



Defence Research and Development Canada  
Recherche et développement pour la défense Canada



## Clan and Islamic Identities in Somali Society

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The scientific or technical validity of this Contract Report is entirely the responsibility of the Contractor and the contents do not necessarily have the approval or endorsement of Defence R&D Canada.

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## **Defence R&D Canada – Toronto**

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## Foreward

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The Socio-cognitive Systems Section (SCS)/DRDC Toronto commissioned this Contract Report in support of the Technology Investment Fund (TIF) Project entitled “A Conceptual Framework for Understanding Armed Non-state Actors (ANSAs): Strategic Roles and Operational Dynamics” (Project Code: 10az01). TIF Projects are forward-looking, high-risk – but potentially high-payoff – research endeavours conducted under the auspices of Defence Research & Development Canada (DRDC), the Science and Technology (S&T) agency of the Department of National Defence (DND), Canada.

The aim of this multi-year Project is to advance our understanding of:

- The **strategic roles** of ANSAs in the context of violent intergroup conflict; and,
- The **operational dynamics** – that is, the group structures, functions and processes – of ANSAs, in both their internal and external aspects, that facilitate the performance of these roles.

Broadly speaking, we seek to shed some light upon what ANSAs do and why they do it, situating the motivations, intent and behaviours of these groups in the wider context of chronic intergroup conflict.

This Report is the final deliverable of a three-month contract in which the Contractor was tasked to explore a wide range of impacts of clan and Islamic identities in Somalia using an alternative perspectives red teaming approach, as well as to develop specific expert capabilities within a constructed academic support network. More specifically, the Contractor was asked to focus on the influence of these identities on Somali everyday life, society in general, and violent and armed non-state actors in particular, especially the radical Islamist group, *al-Shabaab*. This Report will serve to inform our efforts in the next stage – Phase 2 Framework Calibration and Practicum – of the Project’s research program.

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## **Abstract**

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The Socio-cognitive Systems Section (SCSS) of Defence Research and Development Canada – Toronto (DRDC Toronto) has been tasked with advancing our understanding of the motivations, intentions and behaviours of Armed Non-state Actors (ANSAs) in the context of violent intergroup conflict in fragile and failing states. For this, DRDC Toronto has contracted the Royal Military College of Canada's (RMCC) Centre for Security, Armed Forces and Society (CSAFS) to address the question of the importance of clan and Islamic identities in Somali culture using an alternative perspectives (or diegetic red teaming) approach. CSAFS asked six internationally recognized experts on Somalia to tackle this question from the anthropological, historical, political and advocacy perspectives. This Contract Report presents the six papers that represent the culmination of this coordinated and comprehensive effort.

## **Résumé**

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La Section des systèmes sociocognitifs (SSC) de Recherche et développement pour la défense Canada – Toronto (RDDC Toronto) s'est vu confier la tâche d'accroître notre compréhension des motivations, des intentions et des comportements des groupes armés non étatiques dans le contexte des conflits violents entre groupes dans les États fragiles et défaillants. À cette fin, RDDC Toronto a retenu les services du Centre for Security, Armed Forces and Society (CSAFS) du Collège militaire royal pour examiner la question de l'importance de l'identité clanique et de l'identité islamique dans la culture somalienne à l'aide d'une méthode alternative, basée sur l'écoute de perspectives différentes. Le CSAFS a demandé à six experts de renommée internationale sur la Somalie d'aborder cette question des points de vue anthropologique, historique, politique et dans la perspective de la défense des intérêts. Le Rapport final comprend les six documents qui représentent le fruit de cet exercice coordonné et complet.

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# Executive Summary

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## Clan and Islamic Identities in Somali Society:

David Last; Anthony Seaboyer; DRDC Toronto CR 2011-080; Defence R&D  
Canada – Toronto; November 2011.

### A Functional Review of Six Papers

This summary cuts across the six papers that follow to address the sources, methods and approaches represented, clan identities, Islamic identities, the mutual influences of clan and Islamic identity, and the impact of clan and Islamic identity on piracy and *al-Shabaab* – two groups of violent and armed non-state actors, respectively (for a working definition of ‘armed non-state actor’, see Box 1, next page). While the papers address a wide range of impacts of clan and Islamic identity on everyday life, Somali society, armed groups in general, and even Somalia’s role as a source or haven for violence, this summary focuses on identity and non-state actors, with some of the themes and questions raised by considering the six papers together.

It is interesting for future work to know whether we can generalize from the Somali case about the emergence of non-state actors from state entities. Although the papers do not address this question directly, several important themes can be inferred for future consideration. These include: tradition and modernity as social paradigms; governance and legitimacy; inter-generational pressures; local power and national elites as competing sources of security; and the role of conflict and environmental pressure in shaping social responses that may generate anti-foreign violence.

#### A.1 Sources, Methods and Approaches

Six internationally recognized experts on Somalia were asked to address the question: how important is the influence of clan identity and Islamic identity in Somalia? Their contributions were shaped to contribute to a conceptual framework for understanding the strategic roles and operational dynamics of Armed Non-state Actors (ANSAs) like *al-Shabaab*. They approach the research question from anthropological, historical, political and advocacy perspectives, providing a rich and sometimes contradictory balance of perspectives. All authors have first-hand and research knowledge of the region, its people, its current players, and the factors that they discuss.

The authors agree that clan and Islamic identities are crucial variables for understanding the emergence of conflict and violence, and the motivation and mobilization of armed non-state actors. Islamic identity is not necessarily unifying, nor is clan identity inevitably a fragmentary force; each are dynamic and changeable forces that have been used to mobilize and motivate militias and sub-state groups, but also have potential roles in stabilization. Radical Islam appears to be a self-limiting force in Somalia, partly because of clan identities; the degree to which it is intrinsically threatening is debated.

### Box 1. What is an Armed Non-state Actor?

Throughout this Report, the term ANSA refers to:

“An autonomously operating planned group that has the capacity to use violence to achieve political ends.”

Four attributes distinguish an ANSA from other violent groups that operate in the contemporary battlespace:

- *Autonomously operating.* ANSAs are not agents or proxies of a state, though a state may have been instrumental in their inception. They retain the capacity for independent decision making.
- *Planned group.* ANSAs are deliberately formed by their members or an external authority. This excludes groups that come together spontaneously to act without prior arrangement, such as demonstrations, riots, etc.
- *The capacity to use violence.* ANSAs have the motivation, intent, ways and means for the direct or indirect use of force to inflict physical and/or psychological injury to persons or material damage to property. Note, however, the use of the term ‘capacity’. Violence is not necessarily the exclusive nor favoured strategy to achieve the group’s ends in any and all circumstances. Nevertheless, it is available as one arrow within the strategic quiver of the group.
- *To achieve political ends.* ANSAs engage in a contest for power with governments and/or other non-state actors, both armed and unarmed, in the pursuit of political objectives. Their practical political agendas are as varied as the groups themselves, and run the gamut from revolutionary socio-political change to territorial secession. Unlike criminal organizations (like the Somali pirates), their primary motivation is not personal material gain.

For a detailed discussion of this definition, see Moore 2011. For the differences between ANSAs and ‘violent non-state actors’ or VNSAs, see *Ibid.*

All six papers present a common baseline understanding of six major tribal confederacies, ethno-linguistic coherence, and Islam rooted in Sufi mysticism. The historical role of Siad Barre’s regime of nominal socialism combined with clan favouritism in creating the conditions for fragmentation and armed sub-state groups is also mentioned in all six papers, and most refer to environmental or economic pressures exacerbating fragmentation and sub-state violence since the Barre regime.

Beyond this baseline, there are important differences in the approaches of the six. The secondary sources have been compiled in a single bibliography. The most-frequently cited source is the eminent anthropologist I.M. Lewis. Pham and Stevenson are the most frequently cited of the contributing authors. Menkhaus, Marchal, Samatar and Lyons are also prominent sources. Anderson, Grant and Pham provide the richest collection of secondary documentation, while Bruton, Reno and Stevenson rely more heavily on their own understandings of the region.

Oxford Scholar David Anderson has drawn on knowledge of clan, lineage and blood-tie dynamics for the richest introduction to the clan system. His secondary sources on militia recruitment practices should be read with Jonathan Stevenson’s account, which appears to be informed by intelligence and primary sources available to the US Army War College. Bronwyn Bruton, an advocate and field worker, also draws on Somali authors to inform her understanding of clan and Islamic dynamics. Andrew Grant

and Peter Pham have political science backgrounds, and draw out governance and legitimacy as central themes. Pham provides an explicit comparative study of legitimacy in northern and southern Sudan, supporting his contention that decentralization holds the key to stabilization, while Reno and Stevenson seem predisposed to support efforts to achieve unitary government. William Reno, who has travelled extensively in the region, provides the richest inductive suggestions, including historical comparisons to Poland and Ingushetia.

Despite the richness of these alternative approaches, many others are not considered. There is no insider account, no religious or ideological views presented in the first person, and the majority of secondary sources are in English. Efforts to engage Somalis and leaders in the region directly have had mixed results. Some of these are available under other DRDC contracts.

## **A.2 Clan Identities**

Anderson describes the Somali segmentary lineage model consisting of strong patrilineal links, firm clan allegiances (though also conflicts within clan groups), and enforceable blood contracts. No obvious pattern of allegiance between groups emerges from this. He argues that these groupings are not primordial, but dynamic and evolving, and are therefore a feature of Somalia's modern pattern of development. Because clans became increasingly political constituencies for urban and sedentary areas under Barre, the politics of resource allocation has played out in clan and sub-clan groupings. Economic and social opportunism in a stateless society has given new roles to clans.

Bruton largely agrees with this characterization, providing additional detail about the evolution of the clan system through the Barre regime and subsequent state collapse. She cites Menkhaus on the transition from "warlord to landlord" as northern clans occupied the fertile ground of the south, "stolen" under Barre, with infinitely divisible cross-clan alliances increasingly dominating Somali politics. Despite this, Somalis are described as essentially one people, often motivated by nationalism and anti-foreign sentiment.

Grant describes primordial and constructivist theoretical frameworks, and Hale's psychological perspective, which combines elements of each. The first draws on Horowitz's concept of genetic and evolutionary ethnic differences, while the second suggests ongoing and fluid changes to identity. The third describes small-group identity as a refuge from uncertainty. Anderson, Bruton and Grant agree that the politicization of resource distribution under Siad Barre led to the upsurge in clan loyalties and clan-based violence as people sought security and survival; clans offer safe haven in dire times. Reno also supports an instrumental rather than primordial interpretation of clan-based identity. Identity formation draws on historical, social, religious, political, regional, material, and ethnic constructs and interests, and these have changed as populations moved during the civil war period. Kinship and clan identity gain from the non-geographic focus of nomadic groupings. Mismanagement, war, drought, civil conflict, and the reordering of society around warlords made clans rather than common Somali or Islamic identity the dominant force.

Pham emphasises the primacy of legitimacy rooted in paternal descent. Although this legitimacy is too dispersed to enable political cohesion, there are other forces supporting nationalism, including a largely common language, culture and religion. Although Pham is an advocate of bottom-up development and regional autonomy, his description of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) conflict with the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) helps to understand the centrifugal and centripetal pressures of identity in Somalia, which reside in both clan and Islamic identity. The "4.5 formula" for proportional representation in the TFG is clan based: four major clan families plus some space (.5) for the minority clans. However, clans failed to support this formula, seen as a foreign imposition; Ethiopian support alone may have been sufficient to undermine the support of clan leaders, and the TFG holds little sway outside parts of Mogadishu. Similarly, the Islamist UIC seems to lose the support of clans to the extent that it introduces non-

Somali puritanical values or receives support from outsiders. The consequences of both efforts at unification have been greater fragmentation of identity along clan lines.

Reno and Stevenson pick up this theme of centrifugal and centripetal forces in Somali identity. Reno's historical perspective emphasises the instrumental nature of clan identity, invented and reinforced during the colonial era, developed in the 1960s with the invention of new sedentary agricultural clans, and reinforced again with the patronage politics of the Barre era, and the survival-interests of the post-Barre civil war.

Stevenson provides a detailed account of the Barre era and the descent to civil war, but suggests three other observations about clan identity. First, the most pronounced cultural division in Somalia is between the socially more open and accommodating Digil Mirifle, and the pastoral nomadic clans. Second, the source of Somali national identity lies primarily with nomadic culture. Finally, the debate over unitary or federal government structures is conducted primarily at clan level; elites and large clans argue for unitary government, while weaker clans and regions argue for decentralization. The experience of Puntland and Somaliland suggests that decentralization is a prelude to fragmentation, but the challenges of piracy and transnational Jihadism call into question the capacity of decentralized nascent states to control violent and armed non-state actors.

### **A.3 Islamic Identities**

All six authors agree that Somali Islamic identity has been different from that emerging in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States. Anderson underscores the predominantly Sunni Sufi mysticism and its history of conflict with more puritanical Wahabbi Islam. Although there is a history of religious freedom fighters from Somalia's colonial past, these have tended to be nationalist rather than Islamist. The unique local variation of Islam tends to resist universalization.

Bruton adds that Islam is a "veil lightly worn" because Somali Imams often don't speak or read Arabic, so currents of transnational Islamic thought do not permeate Somali culture easily; Islam is readily accepted to the extent that it blends well with local culture and clan loyalties, or to the extent that it supports anti-foreign sentiment. Drawing on Weinstein, Bruton points to three forms of Islamic identity: transnationalism, nationalism and pluralism (permitting power sharing with non-Islamic groups). Most frequently associated with ideological revolt, Islamic identity also shows potential for unification and conciliation. The language of jihad has an important unifying effect, especially to resist foreign incursions. However, groups like *al-Attihad al-Islamiya* (AIAI) have failed to mobilize mixed clans to a common Islamic cause. Even the transnationalist al-Shabaab is concerned with economic activities, and other Islamic groups are primarily concerned with revenues more than religion or ideology. Islamic identity is at its most powerful when it is aligned with local clan interests and political structures. By 2011, there was a visible power struggle between nationalist and transnationalist Islamic leadership, both looking for foreign jihadist backing, and both increasingly isolated from traditional clan structures. Perhaps most importantly, although they dispensed Islamic justice, the UIC depended on clan structures for enforcement, and quickly lost power as they became more extreme.

Grant points to the blending of scientific socialism and Islamic tenets under Barre to support wealth sharing and self-reliance, but notes that many essentially Islamic ideas were already fused

with Somali clan-based identity. Pham points to the rise of Islamic identity after the colonial era, particularly in the 1980s, as more settled populations were more open to its identity-enhancing vision. More recently, Islam has been primarily an urban phenomenon where clans have been unable to provide order and justice. Pham describes the emergence of al-Shabaab as the militant wing of the UIC, and argues that radicalism would not have emerged without social collapse.

While Pham argues that Somali nationalism might help al-Qaeda cement local power, Bruton disagrees, suggesting that nationalism would be seen as clannism, undermining the unifying power of Islam and causing a decline of al-Shabaab.

Reno describes the influence of Islamic identity in terms of clan politics. Although Islam gained ground in violent times as a source of stability, it did so through the influence of clan elders and local elites rather than external religious authorities. Although the Ethiopian invasion increased Islamic identity, clans continued to impede recruitment by non-clan Islamic groups. As Islamic groups began to compete with clans for loyalty, Islam was increasingly resisted. Here Grant, Pham and Reno seem to agree, suggesting that Islamic identity is inherently self-limited as it begins to compete with strong patrilineal clan identities. Reno also notes that fragmentation is the norm amongst Islamic groups, making it difficult for them to provide the security or cohesion afforded by clans.

Stevenson describes *Qadiriya* as the largest Islamic sect, and points to the relative inability of extremism to take hold in any of Somalia's sects. He argues that Somali sheikhs tend to derive their authority from a mediating and problem-solving role, rather than from the authority of the pulpit. The combination of clan identity and resistance to foreign influence makes Somalis susceptible to calls for jihad against foreigners – particularly those in Somalia – but resistant to the leadership of foreign jihadis.

#### **A.4 Influence of Clan and Islamic Identity on Armed Non-State Actors**

In the broadest sense, all the clans and groups within Somalia qualify as violent non-state actors, engaging in both cooperation and conflict with each other and with outside actors. The Islamist ANSA al-Shabaab is the focus of interest for most authors, but Grant and Pham also address the question of piracy off the Horn – primarily an economic activity with few ideological or jihadi overtones.

Anderson argues that the Islamic movements of the 1990s failed to accommodate Somali clan structures and values. Nevertheless, the perception that Islam is under attack by the West does seem to exist in Somalia and contributes to recruitment. Both al-Shabaab and al-Qaeda use the 'victimization narrative' to recruit and sustain support, particularly focusing on the 'foreign invader' trope. Al-Shabaab's struggle is linked to the global war for Islam, and the history of Somali resistance to Christian colonialism and Christian (including Ethiopian) invasion. Any activities that victimize Muslims play into this narrative.

Bruton also finds strong support in Islamic rhetoric and the language of jihad for irredentism, nationalism and resistance to foreign incursions. She cites Menkhaus's work on al-Ittihaad al-Islamiya (AIAI) problems: following majority clan lines exposed AIAI to clan rivalries, while a

more mixed model opened them to charges of exploiting Islam for clan conquest. Abandoning Islamic governance, AIAI attempted infiltration through Islamic charities, but the radical cells had disappeared by 2000. She goes on to describe the evolution of the UIC, dispensing Islamic justice within the framework of clan identity; the Courts were unable to transform this relationship, and the rapid military defeat of the UIC in December 2006 suggests that it was never a deeply-rooted organization.

Grant and Pham describe a similar evolution of al-Shabaab, with Pham describing it as the militant wing of the UIC. Bruton, Grant and Pham agree that the radicalisation of al-Shabaab increased the resistance of clans, for whom severe Islamic justice seemed alien. Grant notes that al-Shabaab's identity derives from both clan and Islam, with the emphasis on the latter, but Islamic practice begins to be a liability as soon as it dictates conflict with traditional clan practices, including elder-mediated conflict (*xeer*) and compensation for death (*diya*).

Grant argues that piracy on the Horn tends to exist in areas of greater clan diversity, where inter-clan cooperation is triggered by the potential for profit. Large ransoms have helped to launch new political careers, and opportunity has caused immigration to the area. As do Bruton and Pham, Grant sees the potential for clan elders to mediate the excesses of younger members recruited to Islamic ideals, and the sub-text here is an inter-generational conflict in which traditional forms of governance and clan loyalty may serve the older generation better than the youth.

Pham points to the collaboration between political authorities in Puntland and the pirates, and suggests that a grand bargain could involve international engagement with Puntland in exchange for greater control of piracy. He argues that Puntland and Somaliland in the north are already more effective at taxing and governing than the anarchic south, and that these governed spaces should become the building blocks of a new Somalia. He acknowledges, however, that their preferred trajectory may be towards independence.

Reno is clear that there is a balance between clan and Islamic identity in support of al-Shabaab. As al-Shabaab's power increases, clan-based opposition to its Islamic agenda also increases. The constant shifting and splitting of alliances limits national cohesion but also limits the reach of unifying and extremist agendas. Distrust of outsiders who are not grounded in kin relationships is widespread in societies that rely on dense and pervasive social connections for the limited stability that they enjoy. The risk to kin limits enthusiasm for jihad.

Stevenson's description of the influence of clan and Islamic identity on non-state actors is focused at the state level. He suggests that the failures of the TFG might have been ameliorated by structural changes to parliament that would allow Sheikh Sharif to draw on credibility with the Islamist community and build a new coalition – presumably reducing over time the number of violent and armed non-state actors. He acknowledges, however, that Islam's scope to act as a unifying force is constrained by clan allegiances, and concludes that continued domestic frustrations might yet make Somalia fertile soil for Islamic extremism.

## **A.5 Themes and Questions beyond the Papers**

The research question was framed in terms of two major competing sources of political identity, but the research papers have raised themes and questions beyond these two major sources of

identity, which might be helpful for subsequent research efforts aimed at developing a generalized conceptual framework of armed non-state actors.

Tradition and modernity have become dated concepts in social science, but may still be useful. The agricultural development of the 1960s and the Barre period of scientific socialism helped to undermine some of the traditional forms of social and economic relations, and opened new sources of identity, particularly for settled and urban populations. This may be related to intergenerational pressures, where youth may be more disconnected from traditional forms of governance and dispute management, or have lost contact with clans and traditions through the dislocation of conflict and environmental pressure.

Intergenerational pressures may also arise because the older generations have a strangle-hold on resources and control over the rules by which they are distributed. When a younger generation sees no hope of achieving its core interests, the regime imposed by an older generation may lose legitimacy, and we see echoes of this in several of the papers, particularly the recruitment targets of both al-Shabaab and Puntland pirates.

Governance and legitimacy might be explored in more generic terms. Although there is a primordial element to clan identity, the consensus seems to be that instrumental, constructed and evolving identities are a better explanation in Somalia. Patrilineal loyalties serve core interests like security in an uncertain environment, and gain legitimacy from serving those interests, but will they eventually lose legitimacy if they are unable to continue to meet needs? The collapse of alternative governance structures like the TFG and UIC both seem to have resulted from their manifest failures to meet needs – in particular they could not provide the Weberian monopoly of the use of force, or the provision of services. These concepts may be a key to generalizing about the sources of identity for non-state actors.

The question of who can provide security and services raises the theme of local centres and national elites as competing sources of security, and the bottom-up building block versus top-down “grand bargain” approaches to stabilization that Pham attributes to David Kilcullen. Non-state actors clearly fall below the level of national elites, but from the research papers it is also clear that it is normal for non-state actors, particularly armed ones, to be embedded in national governance structures, as Hezbollah is embedded in the Lebanese government, and Puntland’s pirates are embedded in Puntland’s government. The way in which local and central actors cooperate and compete raises questions about federal and confederate models of governance, and the influence of decisions to embark on unilateral armament, taxation and coercion. How are these decisions made by non-state actors, and how do they affect subsequent relations with the state, and with other non-state actors? Here the large literature on state formation, some of which appears in the bibliography, may be of use.

Finally, the papers make it clear that conflict and environmental pressure have played a crucial role in shaping social responses and armed non-state actors. There is a lot of work – including reports by the World Bank’s conflict unit, USAID’s Office of Transition Initiatives, and many UN agencies – all pointing to the way in which violence undermines social capacity for response to natural disasters. At the same time, there is the potential for greater incidence of natural and man-made environmental disaster. A theme worthy of further exploration might be the influence of situational, rather than dispositional, factors in pushing non-state actors to arm and act unilaterally within and across the boundaries of states.

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## Sommaire

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### **Clan and Islamic Identities in Somali Society:**

**David Last; Anthony Seaboyer ; DRDC Toronto CR 2011-080 ; R & D pour la défense Canada – Toronto; novembre 2011.**

### **Un examen fonctionnel des six documents**

Le présent sommaire porte sur les six documents suivants et traite des sources, des méthodes et des approches représentées, des identités claniques et islamiques et de leur influence l'une sur l'autre, et de l'impact qu'elles ont sur les pirates et sur *al-Shabaab* – deux groupes non étatiques armés et violents (pour une définition de l'expression « groupe armé non étatique », voir l'encadré 1 de la page suivante). Bien que ces documents traitent d'un large éventail de répercussions au quotidien de l'identité clanique et de l'identité islamique, de la société somalienne, des groupes armés en général, et même du rôle de la Somalie en tant que source de violence ou refuge pour les groupes qui pratiquent la violence, ce sommaire porte principalement sur l'identité et sur les groupes non étatiques, avec certains thèmes et questions découlant de l'examen de l'ensemble des six documents.

Pour les travaux qui seront entrepris à l'avenir, il est bon de savoir que nous pouvons tirer des conclusions générales, à partir du cas de la Somalie, sur l'émergence de groupes armés non étatiques dans des entités étatiques. Même si les documents dont le résumé est présenté ici ne traitent pas directement de cette question, ils suscitent plusieurs thèmes importants qui mériteront d'être examinés à l'avenir, notamment la tradition et la modernité en tant que paradigmes sociaux; la gouvernance et la légitimité; les pressions intergénérationnelles; le pouvoir local et les élites nationales en tant que sources de sécurité concurrentes; et le rôle des pressions qu'exercent les conflits et l'environnement dans la définition des mesures sociales susceptibles d'engendrer la violence contre les étrangers.

### 1.2.1 Sources, méthodes et approches

La question suivante a été posée à six experts de renommée internationale : à quel point l'identité clanique et l'identité islamique ont-elles une influence en Somalie? Leurs réponses ont servi à l'élaboration d'un cadre conceptuel permettant de comprendre les rôles stratégiques et la

dynamique opérationnelle de groupes armés non étatiques tels qu'al-Shabaab. Ils ont abordé cette question de recherche sous divers angles, c'est-à-dire en examinant les aspects anthropologique, historique, politique et de défense des intérêts, bref, un riche éventail de points de vue parfois contradictoires. Tous les auteurs ont acquis de première main et grâce à des travaux de recherche leurs connaissances approfondies de la région, de la population, des acteurs actuels et des facteurs relatifs à la question qui leur a été posée.

Les auteurs sont d'avis que les identités clanique et islamique sont des variables essentielles à la compréhension de l'émergence des conflits et de la violence, et de la motivation et la mobilisation de groupes armés non étatiques. L'identité islamique n'est pas nécessairement un facteur d'unification, et l'identité clanique n'est pas inévitablement fragmentaire par nature; toutes deux sont des forces dynamiques et variables qui ont servi à mobiliser et à motiver des milices et des groupes infra-étatiques, lesquels peuvent toutefois jouer un rôle dans les processus de stabilisation. En Somalie, l'islam radical semble être une force qui a ses propres limites, en partie à cause des identités claniques. Les avis sont partagés quant à la menace intrinsèque que cela représente.

Les six documents présentent la même compréhension de base des points suivants : l'existence de six principales confédérations tribales, la cohérence ethnolinguistique et un islam fondé sur le mysticisme soufi. Tous mentionnent

#### **Encadré 1. Qu'est-ce qu'un groupe armé non étatique?**

Dans le présent rapport, ce terme signifie :

Un groupe organisé agissant de manière autonome et ayant la capacité de recourir à la violence à des fins politiques.

Les quatre attributs suivants distinguent un groupe armé non étatique d'autres groupes violents qui agissent dans l'espace de combat d'aujourd'hui :

- *Groupe autonome.* Il n'agit pas pour le compte d'un État, bien que ce dernier ait pu jouer un rôle dans sa création. Il prend lui-même ses décisions.
- *Groupe organisé.* Il est créé délibérément par ses membres ou par un pouvoir extérieur, ce qui exclut les groupes qui se forment spontanément pour agir d'une manière ponctuelle, comme lors de manifestations, d'émeutes, etc.
- *Capacité de recourir à la violence.* Il a la motivation, l'intention, les façons et les moyens d'utiliser la force directement ou indirectement dans le but d'infliger des blessures physiques ou psychologiques à des personnes ou de causer des dommages matériels. Il convient de souligner que le mot « capacité » est utilisé ici, car la violence n'est pas nécessairement l'unique stratégie ni la préférée qu'un groupe armé non étatique utilise pour parvenir à ses fins. Il n'en demeure pas moins que la violence est une flèche stratégique à l'arc d'un tel groupe.
- *À des fins politiques.* Il s'engage, à des fins politiques, dans une lutte de pouvoir avec le gouvernement en place et/ou autres groupes non étatiques, armés ou non. Les visées politiques de groupes non étatiques sont aussi variées que le nombre de ces groupes, allant du changement socio-politique révolutionnaire jusqu'à la sécession territoriale. Contrairement aux organisations criminelles (comme les pirates somaliens), leur motivation première n'est pas le gain matériel personnel.

également le rôle historique que le régime soi-disant socialiste de Siyad Barre, combiné au favoritisme clanique, a joué dans la création d'un terreau propice à la fragmentation et à la formation de groupes armés infra-étatiques. La plupart des auteurs soulignent en outre le fait que, sous le régime Barre, les pressions environnementales ou économiques ont exacerbé la fragmentation et la violence infra-étatique.

Au-delà de ces points communs, les six auteurs divergent grandement quant à leur façon d'aborder la question. Les sources secondaires ont été compilées en une bibliographie unique. La source qui est citée le plus souvent est l'éminent anthropologue I.M. Lewis. MM. Pham et Stevenson sont les plus cités des six auteurs des documents dont il est question ici. Menkhaus, Marchal, Samatar et Lyons sont aussi des sources importantes. MM. Anderson, Grant et Pham fournissent le plus riche éventail de documents secondaires, tandis que M<sup>me</sup> Bruton et MM. Reno et Stevenson comptent davantage sur leur propre compréhension de la région.

Le chercheur d'Oxford, David Anderson, offre l'introduction au système clanique la plus instructive qui soit, en se basant sur les connaissances sur les clans et sur la dynamique de la lignée et des liens du sang. Il est recommandé de lire ses sources secondaires sur les pratiques de recrutement des milices pour éclairer la lecture du compte rendu de Jonathan Stevenson, qui semble s'être fondé sur des renseignements et des sources primaires auxquelles a accès le Collège de l'armée de guerre américaine. Quant à Bronwyn Bruton, défenseure de la démocratie et travailleuse sur le terrain, elle s'inspire d'auteurs somaliens pour approfondir sa compréhension de la dynamique du clan et du facteur islamique. Andrew Grant et Peter Pham, qui ont tous deux une formation en sciences politiques, ont axé leur étude sur deux grands thèmes : la gouvernance et la légitimité. M. Pham établit une comparaison détaillée entre la légitimité dans le Soudan (Nord) et la légitimité dans le Soudan du Sud, appuyant ainsi son hypothèse selon laquelle la décentralisation est la clé de la stabilisation, tandis que MM. Reno et Stevenson semblent plutôt en faveur d'efforts visant l'établissement d'un gouvernement unifié. William Reno, qui a beaucoup voyagé dans la région, formule les déductions les plus intéressantes, y compris des comparaisons avec les histoires de la Pologne et de l'Ingouchie.

Malgré la richesse de ces différentes approches, il y a plusieurs points de vue qui n'ont pas été pris en compte. Ainsi, aucun auteur n'a présenté un compte rendu de l'intérieur, c'est-à-dire aucune opinion personnelle en matière de religion ou d'idéologie, et la majorité des sources secondaires sont en anglais. Les efforts qui ont été faits pour obtenir la collaboration de Somaliens et de leaders dans la région ont eu des résultats mitigés, dont certains sont le résultat de travaux effectués en vertu d'autres contrats passés par RDRC.

## **1.2.2 Identités claniques**

David Anderson décrit le modèle de lignage segmentaire comme étant constitué de liens patrilinéaires serrés, de solides allégeances aux clans (en dépit des conflits internes), et de contrats du sang exécutoires, qui ne semblent toutefois pas donner lieu, de façon évidente, à un modèle d'allégeance donné entre groupes. Selon lui, ces regroupements ne sont pas primordiaux, mais plutôt dynamiques et évolutifs, et ils sont donc une caractéristique du modèle de développement moderne de la Somalie. Parce que les clans sont devenus de plus en plus des entités politiques dans les régions urbaines et sédentaires sous le régime Barre, la politique d'affectation des ressources a influé sur les groupes et sous-groupes claniques. Les intérêts socio-économiques dans une société sans État ont permis aux clans de jouer de nouveaux rôles.

M<sup>me</sup> Bruton, qui est en grande partie d'accord avec cette caractérisation, ajoute des détails complémentaires sur l'évolution du système clanique durant l'ère Barre et jusqu'à l'effondrement de l'autorité étatique qui s'en est suivi. Elle cite Menkhaus pour expliquer la transition de « seigneur de guerre à propriétaire terrien », lorsque les clans du nord ont commencé à occuper les terres fertiles du sud, « volées » sous le régime Barre. Ce changement a donné lieu à des alliances infiniment divisibles entre clans, lesquelles ont dominé de plus en plus la scène politique somalienne. Malgré tout, M<sup>me</sup> Bruton considère que les Somaliens sont essentiellement un seul peuple, qui est souvent motivé par le nationalisme et animé d'un sentiment xénophobe.

M. Grant décrit les cadres de travail primaire et théorique constructiviste ainsi que la perspective psychologique de Hale, laquelle combine des éléments de chacun des cadres de travail. Le premier tient au concept développé par Horowitz sur les différences génétiques et évolutionnaires des ethnies, tandis que le deuxième tient compte de l'évolution continue et fluide de l'identité. Le troisième décrit l'appartenance à un petit groupe comme un refuge dans un climat d'incertitude. MM. Anderson et Grant et M<sup>me</sup> Bruton estiment en effet que la politisation de la distribution des ressources durant l'ère Barre a entraîné une recrudescence de la loyauté au clan et de la violence issue des clans, car les gens cherchent à assurer leur sécurité et leur survie au sein d'un clan, quand les temps sont difficiles. M. Reno privilégie lui aussi une interprétation instrumentale plutôt que primordiale de l'identité clanique. La formation de l'identité s'appuie sur des fondements et des intérêts historiques, sociaux, religieux, politiques, régionaux, matériels et ethniques, lesquels ont évolué avec les mouvements de population qui ont eu lieu durant la guerre civile. Les liens de parenté et l'identité clanique sont renforcés par la nature nomadique d'un groupe. La mauvaise gouvernance, la guerre, la famine, les conflits civils et le réaménagement de la société en fonction des seigneurs de guerre ont fait que les clans, plutôt que l'identité somalienne ou islamique, sont devenus la force dominante.

M. Pham met l'accent sur l'importance de la légitimité découlant de l'ascendance paternelle. Bien que cette légitimité soit trop dispersée pour assurer la cohésion politique, il y a d'autres forces qui nourrissent le nationalisme, puisque la majorité de la population partage une langue, une culture et une religion communes. Bien que M. Pham prône fortement le développement à partir de la base et l'autonomie régionale, sa description du conflit qui oppose le Gouvernement fédéral de transition et l'Union des tribunaux islamiques permet de comprendre les pressions centrifuges et centripètes de l'identité en Somalie, des pressions qui s'exercent aussi bien sur l'identité clanique que sur l'identité islamique. La formule 4,5 de représentation proportionnelle a servi à constituer le parlement du Gouvernement fédéral transitoire, formule traditionnellement utilisée par les clans, soit quatre familles des clans majeurs et quelques sièges (0,5) pour les clans minoritaires. Or, les clans n'ont pas appuyé cette formule, estimant qu'elle leur était imposée par les étrangers; l'appui de l'Éthiopie a sans doute suffi à affaiblir l'appui des chefs de clans, et le Gouvernement fédéral transitoire a très peu d'autorité à l'extérieur de la capitale, Mogadishu. Il en est de même pour l'Union des tribunaux islamiques qui semble perdre l'appui des clans au point où il adopte des valeurs puritaines non somaliennes ou obtient un soutien de l'extérieur. Les efforts d'unification de ces deux entités ont en fin de compte fragmenté davantage l'identité, laquelle repose de plus en plus sur les clans.

MM. Reno et Stevenson reprennent ce thème du rôle que jouent les forces centrifuges et centripètes dans l'identité somalienne. La perspective historique énoncée par M. Reno met l'accent sur la nature instrumentale de l'identité clanique, laquelle a été inventée et renforcée durant la période coloniale, puis développée dans les années 1960 avec la création de nouveaux

clans sédentaires basés sur l'agriculture, et renforcée de nouveau sous le régime Barre, avec sa politique de patronage, et après la guerre civile qui a suivi et qui a favorisé la poursuite, par les clans, de leurs intérêts personnels aux fins de survie.

M. Stevenson fournit un compte rendu détaillé de l'ère Barre et de la guerre civile, et formule en outre trois autres observations au sujet de l'identité clanique. La première souligne que la division culturelle la plus prononcée en Somalie est celle qui existe entre le clan socialement plus ouvert et plus souple des Digil Mirifle et les clans pastoraux nomades. La deuxième observation indique que la source de l'identité nationale somalienne repose essentiellement sur une culture nomade. Enfin, M. Stevenson mentionne que le débat entre ceux qui privilégient une structure unitaire et ceux qui préfèrent un gouvernement fédéral a lieu au niveau des clans; les élites et les clans majeurs sont en faveur d'un gouvernement unitaire, tandis que les clans mineurs et les régions prônent la décentralisation. L'expérience du Puntland et du Somaliland démontre que la décentralisation peut être un prélude à la fragmentation. Par contre, la piraterie et le djihadisme transnational sont des problèmes qui remettent en question la capacité des États émergents qui sont décentralisés de contrôler les groupes armés violents non étatiques.

### **1.2.3 Identités islamiques**

Les six auteurs s'entendent sur le fait que l'identité islamique somalienne est différente de l'identité islamique qui émerge en Arabie saoudite et dans les pays du Golfe. À cet égard, M. Anderson fait remarquer qu'il s'agit d'un islam largement fondé sur le mysticisme soufi sunnite, dont l'histoire est semée de conflits avec l'islam wahabbi, plus puritain. Bien qu'il y ait eu des combattants pour la liberté de religion durant l'époque coloniale en Somalie, ils étaient davantage nationalistes qu'islamistes. Le type d'Islam unique qui y est pratiqué semble résister à l'universalisation.

M<sup>me</sup> Bruton ajoute que l'islam est un « voile porté légèrement », car en général, les imams somaliens ne parlent ni ne lisent l'arabe, ce qui fait que les courants de pensée islamiques transnationaux ne pénètrent pas facilement la culture somalienne; l'islam est facilement accepté dans la mesure où cette religion s'adapte bien à la culture locale et au principe de loyauté au clan, ou dans la mesure où elle intègre le sentiment xénophobe. S'inspirant de Weinstein, M<sup>me</sup> Bruton explique qu'il existe trois formes d'identité islamique, soit transnationale, nationale et pluraliste (celle-ci permettant le partage du pouvoir avec des groupes non islamistes). Le plus souvent associée à la révolte idéologique, l'identité islamique peut favoriser l'unification et la conciliation. Le langage de la « djihad » (guerre sainte) a un effet unificateur non négligeable, surtout pour résister aux interventions de puissances étrangères. Cela dit, des groupes comme al-Attihad al-Islamiya (AIAI) n'ont pas réussi à mobiliser les divers clans en faveur d'une cause islamique commune. C'est également le cas d'al-Shabaab, un groupe transnational axé sur des activités économiques, et d'autres groupes islamiques qui se préoccupent davantage de leurs revenus que de religion ou d'idéologie. L'identité islamique est d'autant plus forte, lorsqu'elle est conforme aux intérêts et aux structures politiques des clans locaux. À partir de 2011, le camp islamique nationaliste et le camp transnationaliste ont été visiblement engagés dans une lutte de pouvoir, tous deux en quête d'appui de djihadistes étrangers et de plus en plus isolés des structures claniques traditionnelles. Ce qu'il est sans doute le plus important de noter est que, bien que l'Union des tribunaux islamiques dispensait une justice islamique, elle comptait sur les structures claniques pour l'exécuter et, par conséquent, a rapidement perdu de son autorité à mesure que les clans ont été imprégnés de l'esprit extrémiste.

M. Grant attire l'attention sur la fusion qui s'est opérée sous le régime Barre entre le socialisme scientifique et les principes de l'islam afin de favoriser le partage de la richesse et l'autonomie. Il fait toutefois remarquer que bon nombre d'idéologies islamiques fondamentales étaient déjà inscrites dans l'identité clanique somalienne. M. Pham explique que l'identité islamique s'est renforcée après la période coloniale, particulièrement dans les années 1980, grâce à une plus grande ouverture de la population à la vision d'une identité bien ancrée. Récemment, cette recrudescence de l'islam a été surtout un phénomène urbain, étant donné que les clans se sont avérés incapables d'appliquer l'ordre et la justice dans les villes. M. Pham décrit l'émergence du groupe al-Shabaab en tant qu'aile militante de l'Union des tribunaux islamiques. Il estime que le radicalisme n'aurait pu faire surface s'il n'y avait pas eu un effondrement social.

Alors que M. Pham soutient que le nationalisme somalien pourrait aider Al-Qaïda à cimenter le pouvoir local, M<sup>me</sup> Bruton est au contraire d'avis que le nationalisme serait considéré comme une forme de clanisme, ce qui minimiserait le pouvoir unificateur de l'islam et entraînerait le déclin d'al-Shabaab.

M. Reno explique l'influence de l'identité islamique en fonction de la politique clanique. Bien que l'islam ait gagné en popularité durant des époques violentes pour son effet stabilisateur, cela a été attribuable à l'influence des anciens des clans et des élites locales plutôt qu'à des autorités religieuses de l'extérieur. Même si l'invasion éthiopienne a rehaussé l'identité islamique, les clans continuent de nuire aux tentatives de recrutement de la part des groupes islamiques extérieurs aux clans. Avec la concurrence que ces groupes islamiques ont commencé à livrer aux clans pour se mériter la loyauté des adhérents, il s'est formé une résistance à l'islam de plus en plus vive. MM. Grant, Pham et Reno semblent s'accorder sur ce point, ajoutant que l'identité islamique est en soi limitative, lorsqu'elle doit faire face aux identités claniques très fortes, qui sont fondées sur le lignage patriarcal. M. Reno fait également observer que la fragmentation est la norme parmi les groupes islamiques, ce qui les empêche d'offrir la sécurité et la cohésion que permet l'appartenance à un clan.

M. Stevenson décrit la secte *Qadiriya* comme étant la plus importante secte islamique, en soulignant l'incapacité relative de l'extrémisme de s'imposer dans les sectes en Somalie. Selon lui, l'autorité dont jouissent les sheikhs en Somalie repose généralement sur leur rôle de médiateur et leur pouvoir de résoudre les problèmes, plutôt que sur un rôle de prêcheur. Ainsi, la combinaison de l'identité clanique et de la résistance aux influences étrangères fait que les Somaliens sont facilement attirés par les appels à la guerre contre les étrangers – particulièrement ceux qui se trouvent en sol somalien – mais acceptent difficilement le leadership de djihadistes étrangers.

#### **1.2.4 Influence des identités clanique et islamique sur les groupes armés non étatiques**

Dans un sens large, tous les clans et groupes en Somalie sont des groupes violents non étatiques qui coopèrent entre eux et se font également concurrence, affichant par ailleurs les mêmes comportements avec des groupes de l'extérieur. Le groupe armé non étatique islamique al-Shabaab est celui qui a été le plus examiné par la plupart des auteurs, bien que MM. Grant et Pham aient en outre abordé la question de la piraterie au large du cap Horn – une activité qui est

avant tout de nature économique, où les idéologies et les visions de djihad exercent peu d'influence.

M. Anderson estime que les mouvements islamiques des années 1990 ne sont pas parvenus à intégrer les structures et les valeurs claniques de la Somalie. Cela dit, les Somaliens semblent percevoir l'islam comme une religion à laquelle s'attaque l'Occident, ce qui encourage le recrutement de fidèles. Les groupes al-Shabaab et Al-Qaïda font appel à un sentiment de victimisation, prétendument causé par l'envahisseur étranger, pour recruter des membres et les conserver en leur sein. La lutte d'al-Shabaab est liée à la lutte mondiale en faveur de l'islam, et l'histoire de la résistance somalienne est liée au colonialisme chrétien et à l'invasion chrétienne (y compris de l'Éthiopie). Toute activité susceptible de victimiser les musulmans alimente ce discours.

Selon M<sup>me</sup> Bruton, la rhétorique islamique et le langage du djihad en ce qui a trait à l'irrédentisme, au nationalisme et à la résistance aux interférences étrangères viennent appuyer cette thèse. Elle cite d'ailleurs les travaux de Menkhaus sur les problèmes auxquels fait face le groupe al-Ittihaad al-Islamiya (AIAI) : en adoptant les lignes claniques majeures, l'AIAI s'est exposée aux rivalités de clans, tandis qu'un modèle plus hétérogène le rendait vulnérable, puisqu'il pouvait être accusé d'exploiter l'islam dans le but de s'attirer des clans. Après avoir délaissé la gouvernance islamique, l'AIAI a tenté de s'infiltrer dans des œuvres de bienfaisance islamiques, mais, en 2000, ses cellules radicales avaient disparu. M<sup>me</sup> Bruton décrit ensuite l'évolution de l'Union des tribunaux islamiques, laquelle dispensait une justice islamique fondée sur l'identité clanique; le fait que les tribunaux n'ont pas réussi à transformer ce cadre de référence et que l'Union des tribunaux islamiques a connu une défaite militaire rapide en décembre 2006 donnent à penser que cette organisation n'avait pas des fondements solides.

MM. Grant et Pham décrivent l'évolution du groupe al-Shabaab comme étant semblable à celle de l'Union des tribunaux islamiques. M. Pham considère d'ailleurs al-Shabaab en tant qu'aile militante de cette dernière. M<sup>me</sup> Bruton ainsi que MM. Grant et Pham sont d'avis que la radicalisation du groupe al-Shabaab a accru la résistance des clans à s'y joindre, étant donné qu'une justice islamique sévère n'est pas conforme à leurs traditions. M. Grant ajoute que l'identité d'al-Shabaab tient à la fois du clan et de l'islam, bien que ce dernier élément ait plus de poids. Toutefois, pour al-Shabaab, la pratique islamique devient problématique dès qu'elle entre en conflit avec les pratiques traditionnelles des clans, notamment la médiation des conflits par les anciens (*xeer*) et le versement du « prix du sang » (*diya*).

Selon M. Grant, la piraterie dans la région du cap Horn est plus répandue là où il y a une plus grande diversité de clans et où l'attrait du gain favorise la coopération entre ces derniers. Les rançons importantes qui ont été obtenues ont permis de lancer de nouvelles carrières politiques et d'attirer des immigrants dans la région. À l'instar de M<sup>me</sup> Bruton et de M. Pham, M. Grant voit la possibilité pour les anciens des clans d'atténuer l'ardeur excessive des jeunes membres qui adhèrent aux idéaux islamiques, sous-entendant que la génération des aînés pourrait bénéficier davantage que les jeunes d'un conflit intergénérationnel où prévaudraient les formes de gouvernance traditionnelles et la loyauté au clan.

M. Pham fait état de la collaboration qui existe entre les autorités politiques du Puntland et les pirates, envisageant la possibilité qu'une négociation majeure soit engagée entre le Puntland et la communauté mondiale pour que celle-ci ait une plus grande latitude dans la lutte contre la

piraterie. Selon lui, le Puntland et le Somaliland, tous deux situés dans le nord, réussissent plus efficacement à prélever les impôts et à gouverner que ce que parviennent à faire les autorités dans le sud, où règne l'anarchie, et devraient donc devenir les pierres d'assise d'une nouvelle Somalie. Il reconnaît toutefois que chacune de ces deux entités du nord privilégie l'indépendance.

Quant à M. Reno, il est clair qu'un équilibre entre l'identité clanique et l'identité islamique doit être atteint pour que le groupe al-Shabaab puisse bénéficier d'un soutien. En ce moment, il y a un déséquilibre, car plus le pouvoir d'al-Shabaab s'accroît, plus l'opposition des clans à son programme islamique augmente. Le fait que les alliances se nouent et se dénouent constamment freine la cohésion nationale, mais limite aussi la possibilité que s'établissent des programmes unificateurs et extrémistes. La méfiance envers les gens de l'extérieur qui n'ont aucun lien de parenté est un phénomène courant dans les sociétés fondées sur des rapports sociaux serrés et omniprésents, un phénomène qui assure d'ailleurs la stabilité limitée dont elles jouissent. La menace que représentent les interférences extérieures pour les liens familiaux limite l'enthousiasme pour le djihad.

Pour M. Stevenson, l'influence des identités clanique et islamique sur les groupes non étatiques se situe au niveau de l'État. Selon lui, le Gouvernement fédéral de transition aurait pu minimiser ses échecs si des changements structurels avaient été apportés au parlement, de manière à ce que Sheikh Sharif puisse miser sur sa crédibilité auprès de la communauté islamique et bâtir une nouvelle coalition, ce qui aurait probablement réduit, au fil du temps, le nombre de groupes armés et violents non étatiques. Il reconnaît, néanmoins, que l'allégeance au clan limite la possibilité pour l'islam d'agir comme une force unificatrice et conclut que le sentiment de frustration de la population pourrait faire de la Somalie un terrain fertile pour l'extrémisme islamique.

### **1.2.5 Autres thèmes et questions soulevés par ces travaux de recherche**

Bien que la question de recherche portait sur deux sources majeures d'identité politique, les travaux de recherche ont soulevé d'autres thèmes et questions qui pourraient s'avérer utiles dans la perspective d'efforts de recherche futurs visant à élaborer un cadre conceptuel généralisé concernant les groupes armés non étatiques.

La tradition et la modernité, aujourd'hui considérées comme des concepts désuets en sciences sociales, demeurent toutefois utiles. Le développement agricole des années 1960 et l'ère Barre, caractérisée par un socialisme scientifique, ont contribué à miner certaines formes traditionnelles de rapports socio-économiques, suscitant de nouvelles sources d'identité, particulièrement pour les populations sédentaires et urbaines. Cela peut être lié aux pressions intergénérationnelles, où les jeunes sont souvent déconnectés des formes traditionnelles de gouvernance et de médiation des différends ou dissociés des clans et des traditions en raison de la dislocation causée par les conflits et la pression environnementale.

Une autre raison qui peut expliquer les pressions intergénérationnelles est le fait que les générations précédentes ont une emprise sur les ressources et exercent un contrôle sur les règles régissant leur distribution. Lorsque les jeunes générations n'ont aucun espoir de poursuivre leurs intérêts fondamentaux, le régime imposé par la génération précédente peut perdre de sa légitimité; nous en voyons les échos dans plusieurs des documents, et particulièrement dans les cibles du recrutement des pirates d'al-Shabaab et du Puntland.



La gouvernance et la légitimité peuvent également être examinées en termes plus génériques. Bien que l'identité clanique tienne à un élément primordial, tous les auteurs semblent d'avis que, en ce qui concerne la Somalie, les identités instrumentales, construites et évolutives sont une meilleure explication. Les loyautés patrilinéaires servent des intérêts fondamentaux, telle la sécurité dans un environnement incertain, et acquièrent leur légitimité lorsque ces intérêts sont servis. Or, cette légitimité risque-t-elle de s'amenuiser si les loyautés patrilinéaires ne peuvent plus continuer à répondre aux besoins? L'effondrement de structures de gouvernance différentes telles que le Gouvernement fédéral de transition et l'Union des tribunaux islamiques semble avoir découlé, dans les deux cas, de leur échec manifeste à répondre aux besoins. Elles n'ont pas réussi, notamment, à fournir le monopole wébérien de l'utilisation de la force ni à fournir des services. Ces concepts peuvent constituer une clé de la généralisation en ce qui concerne les sources de l'identité des groupes non étatiques.

La question de savoir qui est le plus apte à fournir la sécurité et les services soulève le thème de la concurrence entre les centres locaux et les élites nationales comme sources de sécurité et celui des approches en matière de stabilisation que sont l'édification du bas vers le haut et la « négociation majeure », que M. Pham attribue à David Kilcullen. Les groupes non étatiques se situent sans contredit en deçà du niveau des élites nationales, mais il est en outre clair, dans les documents de recherche, qu'il est normal pour des groupes non étatiques, particulièrement ceux qui sont armés, d'être intégrés dans des structures de gouvernance nationales, comme le Hezbollah, par exemple, qui est intégré au gouvernement libanais, ou les pirates du Puntland qui font partie du gouvernement du Puntland. La façon dont les acteurs locaux et centraux coopèrent et se livrent concurrence met en doute l'efficacité des modèles de gouvernance fédéral et confédéral ainsi que l'influence des décisions sur le recours à l'armement unilatéral, la taxation et la coercition. Comment ces décisions sont-elles prises par des acteurs non étatiques, et quelle est leur incidence sur leurs relations subséquentes avec l'État et avec d'autres groupes non étatiques? C'est là que peuvent s'avérer utiles les nombreux ouvrages savants sur la formation des États, dont plusieurs figurent dans la bibliographie.

Enfin, il est clair, dans les documents, que les conflits et la pression environnementale ont joué un rôle crucial dans la définition des réponses sociales et la formation de groupes armés non étatiques. Nombreux sont les travaux, y compris des rapports rédigés par l'Unité post-conflits de la Banque mondiale, par le Bureau des initiatives de transition d'USAID, et par plusieurs agences de l'ONU, qui concluent que la violence mine la capacité sociale de réponse aux catastrophes naturelles. Par ailleurs, il y a une élévation de l'incidence des catastrophes naturelles et des catastrophes induites par l'homme. Un thème qui mériterait d'être étudié davantage pourrait être celui de l'influence que les facteurs situationnels, plutôt que décisionnels, exercent sur les groupes non étatiques pour les pousser à agir unilatéralement au sein de l'État et par-delà les frontières des États. November2011

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# 1 Introduction

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The Royal Military College of Canada's (RMCC) Centre for Security, Armed Forces and Society (CSAFS) managed a group of contracts from DRDC in 2010-2011 that served to provide alternative perspectives and to develop a "red teaming academic support network" (RTASN) related to Sudan, the Horn of Africa and red team processes. The academic support network harnesses specific expertise necessary to provide alternative perspectives – also known as *diegetic red teaming* – to staff planners, defence researchers and decision-makers.

This project is interesting because it represents a social science research partnership between two government organizations within the framework of a service level agreement between DRDC and RMCC. Within this framework, RMCC and CSAFS are more than contractors – they are research partners for DRDC, multiplying the value obtained from each research dollar while observing all government regulations on expenditures. Involving cadets and graduate students who are already engaged in government service helps to build DRDC's constituency and raise awareness among future clients.

While executing this project, CSAFS managed thirteen separate activities and more than 40 contracts produced 28 separate papers related to the overall objective. Work to support DRDC Toronto's project on Armed Non-State Actors (ANSAs) involved four of the activities: two workshops, a student colloquium and a student simulation. The six papers collected in this volume were commissioned specifically to support the ANSA project, but also drew on many of the other projects and activities over the course of the contract from September 2010 to March 2011.

Central to the success of the project was the selection and balance of the expert viewpoints incorporated. With a tight working timeline of less than three months for most of the work to be completed, there was no opportunity to develop new expertise or to fund original research. The Director of CSAFS was charged with finding the best expertise available from a variety of different perspectives, including the academic world, Canadian and foreign governments, and the non-governmental sector, including activists who often have privileged access to troubled parts of the world.

To find the best expertise available, experienced academics supervised masters-level researchers conducting citation searches, literature reviews, conference proceeding searches, cold-calls to research centres, and follow-up with academic, governmental and non-governmental contacts as far away as Australia, South Africa, Kenya, Israel, and all over Europe and North America.

Government of Canada procedures were followed for every individual contract. This meant that after the most desirable and available talent had been identified, CSAFS had to issue a call for proposals to fulfil statements of work that CSAFS drafted to meet DRDC requirements. Subject experts at RMCC and partner institutions then evaluated the proposals according to quality, availability (could they meet the deadline) and price (many of the contracts were valued at less than CAN\$1,500). It should be noted that there is a great deal of good will towards this enterprise; top rank experts are prepared to work for very small contracts. Each contract had to be justified as a competitive bid. Upon completion of the papers, many were submitted for further review and editing, and some will be made available in modified form for publication in

academic journals. DRDC was completely relieved of the burden of drafting and managing many individual contracts, which were nevertheless executed according to government standards.

This is one of several contracts executed by RMCC and CSAFS in 2010-2011, which has supported a new capability to generate and coordinate academic research in support of defence science needs, from within the defence establishment. The cadets, students and professors engaged in the project are new allies with a better awareness of defence science contributions to future operations. The academic support network for this project has particular expertise regarding the Horn of Africa, but the process for involving an eclectic international community of experts at short notice and with minimal administrative burden has been established and tested. It represents a new capability for defence science.

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November 2011



## 2 Clan and Islamic Identity in Somalia

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### 2.1 Introduction

Somalia's unique position as the 'worst case scenario' of a failed state in Africa has been broadly established over the past two decades through a plethora of reports and analyses, including a wide variety of *academic* works as well as policy papers and applied research on technical matters such as state-building, post-conflict reconstruction, peace building, power sharing, and humanitarian intervention. The notoriety of this failure, fuelled by the recurrent 'crises' that the shifts in Somalia's politics have provoked, has led to Somali social institutions, culture and religion being viewed in negative terms – each being stigmatised as in some way causally related to the downfall of the state. In this way, many of the cultural features unique to Somalia have come to feature as apparent explanations of state failure. As a result, narratives that chart the recurrence and dominance of violence, for example, typically configure divisive clan allegiances and extremist religion as the central causes of Somalia's internecine conflicts.

Such notions and images have become our 'received wisdom' on the causes of Somalia's troubles; but are these popular analytical assumptions about clan, religion and nationalism in Somalia actually true? This literature review considers the range of evidence that has been produced in relation to two specific issues, the role of clan identity and the role of Islamic identity in Somali social life and politics, and relates this to the recruitment and maintenance of militias in Somalia. In doing so, it will become apparent that our 'received wisdom' on clan and Islam in Somalia is, in fact, a grossly simplified caricature of a more complex and nuanced social and political reality. Clan and Islam do have a role to play in the inception of modern militias such as *Harakat al-Shabaab*, but how precisely that role is to be understood is a matter for debate, and indeed may require further and more directed primary research in order to resolve.

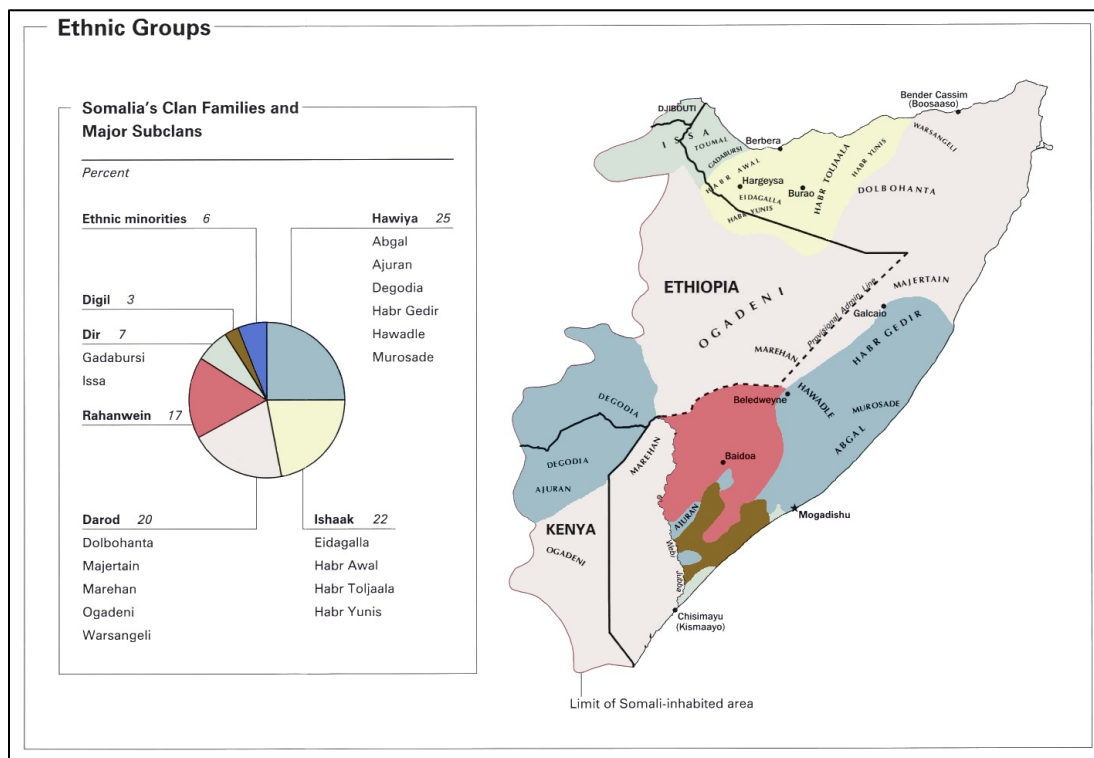
This review will accordingly examine clans, lineage and blood-ties with a wide lens, seeking to understand how these important facets of Somali society have been viewed by anthropologists and historians, in addition to academics interested in political and conflict studies. Academic and policy analyses of Somalia's particular Islamic culture will then be explored and the history of brief but important uprisings will be detailed as illustrative of the dynamics and key forces at work in Somali Islam. The coverage of the inception and growth of political Islam in the modern period will be examined and writings on al-Shabaab and their recruitment policies summarised. In attempting such a broad review in such a short document, this paper aims to introduce the reader to key works in the area while also providing basic insights into Somali culture, clan structure and religion. Finally, in the concluding section all relevant information available in the public domain on the recruitment practices of Somali militia has been gathered and analysed.

### 2.2 Somalia's Unique Social Institutions and Cultural Norms

There are six main clan divisions in Somalia, each of which traces its lineage back to legendary Arabian figures said to have themselves been directly related to the prophet Mohammed. These groups are further divided by a series of sub-clans which came into being over the 1000 years of

migration from northern port cities to the inland Southern and Eastern reaches of modern Somalia. The most cited of explanations of the clan structure, which is implicated in almost all economic and social relations in Somalia, is given by I.M. Lewis (2003). Lewis's matter-of-fact summary of 'clanism' in Somalia provides a basis for understanding the structure, history and geographical location of these various groupings and makes a useful starting point, though, as will become clear, his interpretations have been robustly challenged by other scholars.

Let us begin with territoriality. As the map below shows, clans can be approximately associated with specific geographical regions of 'greater' Somalia. The Dir and the Isaaq dominate Somaliland in the North, and ethnic Somalis in Djibouti are also most commonly linked with these same two clans. In the north-central areas, where the now autonomous proto-state of Puntland has come into being, most recently infamous as the base from which so many pirate attacks have been launched, the Darod are the dominant clan. The Darod are the largest of all the Somali clans, and their members are in fact to be found distributed over the entire greater Somalia region. The Hawiye, next in population size to the Darod, occupy much of central Somalia, but are also strongly represented among ethnic Somalis living in northern Kenya and southern Ethiopia. Finally, the broad area of central and southern Somalia down to the Juba river is predominantly populated by Rahanweyn and Digil clans, these both being commonly known as cultivators and workers of the land. Across the Juba river and moving over the border into northern Kenya, the Darod again emerge as the dominant clan (Lewis 2003).



Source: CIA (2002), Somalia Clan Map. Available online at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Somalia\\_ethnic\\_grps\\_2002.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Somalia_ethnic_grps_2002.jpg).

*Figure 1: Somalia Ethnic Groups.*

Dir, Isaak, Digil, Hawiye, Darod and Rahanweyn comprise what might be termed the 'upper level' of the Somali clan system. Below these upper level clans, and operating within their orbits,

exist scores of major sub-clans and hundreds of minor sub-sub-clans. The diagram reproduced above (Figure 1) indicates the numbers of sub-clans found within each upper level clan, some being listed by name. This hierarchy of clan, sub-clan, and sub-sub-clan suggests relationships of affiliation and authority, but the issue is not so easy to define. In reality, some sub-clans closely related within the same upper level clan are in fact more opposed to one another than they are to clans emanating from another upper level clan. As we shall explain, such relationships are in practice determined by far more than simple lineage or blood-ties (Abdullahi 2001).

### 2.2.1 The Segmentary Lineage Model: Patrilineality, *Xeer* and *Diya*

Anthropologists typically describe Somali clan membership and sub-clan division as being a ‘segmentary lineage model’. It is predominately through this conceptual understanding that all the major catastrophic events in Somalia over the past two decades have been interpreted, by both academics and the media: in blunt terms, the ‘segmentary lineage model’ is thus viewed as having fomented and to some extent consolidated conflict (Besteman 1999). Critical to understanding how the ‘segmentary lineage model’ applies in Somalia are two other related factors: firstly, the definition of lineage relationships solely through the male line; and secondly, the importance of blood contracts (known to the Somali as *xeer*). Both features have been presented as contingent to conflict in Somalia.

For I.M. Lewis, still the most widely read and influential among all of the scholars who have written about Somalia, the most pervasive organisational principle in Somali society is patrilineality. In relation to clans, Lewis (2003: 10) tells us that: “Genealogies tracing descent (*tol*) from common ancestors are the basis for the division of the population into clan and sub-clan” Lewis sees this as a **timeless and unchanging** feature of the system, insisting that these ties have remained obdurately relevant despite the influence of modern economics, nationalism, and urban migration. Somalis’ personal understanding of their own lineage can often stretch back twenty generations and this, Lewis argues, allows individuals to determine their closeness – or “the number of generations counted apart” (Lewis 2003: 168) – to each other better than any other indicator. In this way, Somalis can count backwards from their father, their grandfather, their great-grandfather and so on, until a mutual relative is found. Practically, adherence to this model would suggest that Somalis are more loyal to individuals with closer patrilineal ties. Accordingly to this logic, if a Somali had to make a choice between two friends arguing over a serious issue, he would be more likely to ally with the one with less “generations counted apart” – a shared great-grandfather rather than a shared descendant three generations earlier.

The diffuse distribution of clans, and their uncertain relationships to one another at the sub-clan level, combines with the allegiances derived through patrilineality to cause a great deal of confusion as to who should support whom in matters of conflict or economics. There is, quite simply, no clear immediate or obvious pattern of affiliations that can be discerned. However, blood contracts, known traditionally as *xeer*, supposedly help in determining loyalties and affiliations. *Xeer* is a type of local contract law. According to Lewis’s (1994) account, *xeer* helps to delineate the limits of solidarity in the Somali social system. *Diya* lies at the heart of this, being for Lewis the central function of *Xeer*. *Diya* arrangements specify which family members will benefit from blood compensation should a relative be killed. The payment for a lost clan member has generally been set at 100 camels – which remains as high a cost in today’s currency as it surely was before colonialism (Marchal 1993a). In case of a default on paying compensation, these same individuals are also responsible for seeking out vengeance. Finally, the role of marriage should also be considered as another organising mechanism within this system.

Marriages unite clans and help lubricate frictions over grazing rights, land and access to water resources (Gundel & Dharbaxo 2006). But in a strong patrilineal society, the position of women placed in marriages for political ends may not be especially secure.

The Somali segmentary lineage model has hence been seen to consist of strong patrilineal linkages, firm clan allegiances and enforceable blood contracts (*diya*). Whether directly referenced in academic works or inferred in media analysis, this model has been frequently used to explain the origin of conflict in Somalia. It is most commonly visible in media reportage that has accompanied Somali humanitarian disasters. The imagery it brings out tends to invoke the primordial and bestial character of Somali society.

### 2.2.2 Primordialist or Modernist?

In her study of Somali society since the collapse of the Siad Barre government in 1991, Besteman (1994) provides a list of quotations from the media and other popular sources to indicate this grossly simplistic portrayal of Somalia. For example, she quotes *Time* magazine informing its readers in 1992 that “[t]he clans of Somalia have regularly battled one another into a state of anarchy”, while in the same year the *New York Times* claimed that the ramping up of conflict in Somalia was because “[i]nstead of fighting with traditional spears and shields, the clans have more recently conducted their feuds with mortars and machine guns” (Besteman 1999: 4). Both these statements are demonstrably untrue – the anarchy of Somalia since 1991 is unprecedented, Somalis do not have feuds and automatic weapons have been widely in use since the late 1950s – yet both have come to epitomise the apparent ‘truisms’ of the Somali conflicts. Such misrepresentations of the clan as an agency of conflict among Somali draw upon ideas of clan relations as supposedly primary, fixed and ancient. This form of ‘primordialism’, as Besteman terms it, is also evident in some academic treatments of Somali conflict. Thus, Laitin and Said Samatar tell us that:

“Genealogy therefore constitutes the heart of the Somali social system and is the basis of the Somali collective predilection to internal fissions and internecine sectionary conflicts as well as of the unity of thought and action among Somalis - a unity that borders on xenophobia” (Laitan & Samatar 1987: 29; Samatar 1992: 625-641).

However, there is a larger and still growing body of scholarship that rejects such ‘primordialism’ and instead promotes a dynamic, responsive and changing model of Somali society. Abdi Samatar is among these writers. Commenting on popular and academic analyses of the fall of Siad Barre in 1992, Samatar (1992) resents the assertion that the form of ‘clanism’ witnessed in Somalia in the present day bears any resemblance to the systems that preceded colonialism. In his view, to position the modern Somali conflict as an outcome of a well established segmentary lineage model, as Lewis does, is deeply unhelpful. He suggests that the commoditisation of agricultural practices among Somali eroded the social system of *xeer*, which according to Samatar, was in practice a more comprehensive system of natural law encompassing social relations that went far beyond the blood contracts emphasised by Lewis. In this representation, many groups and clans (especially those in southern Somalia) shared an agro-pastoralist lifestyle that necessitated they work together to combat the harsh conditions which could randomly befall any individual or group working alone. Furthermore, Samatar suggests that in this evolving system, which also involved intimate social and economic relations with pastoral groups, productivity was key to the functioning of political power:

“In fact, those who were not productive, and consequently unable to care for their households, had no standing in the community, let alone the ability to command any authority. In other words, being a competent pastoral manager or a good peasant was a necessary prerequisite for any leadership post” (Samatar 1992: 639).

For Samatar, then, there is no comparison between traditional Somali culture of which clans were a significant but interrelated element, and the situation today where clan allegiance has become divorced from the shared sense of responsibility and order to which this system was once intrinsically linked. Implicit in Samatar’s argument is the recognition that Somali society has been in the process of significant social change since at least the mid-nineteenth century, driven initially by increasing pastoral mobility, the incorporation of agriculturalists, and, latterly, greater sedentarisation and urbanisation for a portion of the population. These are processes and trends that clearly emerge in the excellent historical work of Cassanelli and others (Barnes 2006: 487-98; Bemath 1992: 33-47; Brons 2001; Cassanelli 1982; Samatar 1992).

If, then, the place of *xeer* and *diya* in Somali society has been changing, what has happened to the clan and how are relations between clans mediated? Anna Simons (1995), another anthropologist, summarises Samatar’s point by stating that the current ‘clanism’ prevalent in Somalia is real enough, but that it should be read as “kinship without *xeer*” (Simmons 1995: 138). In effect, clans have become increasingly autonomous entities, less regulated by supposed social norms and instead subject to more opportunistic political and economic forces.

In addressing this apparent separation of clan from other constituent elements of traditional Somali culture, Samatar (1992) points to the rise of the political movement for independence in the 1950s, and the subsequent struggle for votes and power as a key influence on the restructuring and heightened importance of clans. He argues that the clan system provided an easily accessible platform for an emerging political class to organise, mobilise and motivate. In a political environment where all politicians were anti-colonialist and all were nationalist, ideological differences were absent. Clan became the basis for establishing a political constituency – the first building-block in constructing a support base for political action. As Somalia moved to independence in the early 1960s, the struggle for access to state resources created a government connected class (Bayart 1993) of political actors who competed to control patronage networks that were fuelled by Somalia’s peculiar place amid Cold War rivalries as an ally of the Soviets (until the mid-1970s). (Lewis 1994 is an excellent example of the blend of old and new processes). As Said Barre promoted the nationalist state of Somalia, the politics of mobilisation and resource allocation within that state was in fact dividing it amongst itself. In this process clans became political entities in a way they had never been before.

This explanation has great merit in describing and understanding the political modalities that are apparent in Somalia since the dissolution of the Barre state after 1991. Government resource allocations disappeared in 1991, but only to be replaced by revenues available from external sources. Where the political class once competed for government largesse, they now seek to control external funding channels and local economic opportunities through the mobilisation of clan affiliations and loyalties. To outsiders, the configurations that mobilise this system can seem purposefully opaque, although their complexities are defined only by modern patronage rather than the logics of ‘traditional’ society (World Bank 2005). The clue to clan affiliations, and thus clan identity, therefore, lies in an understanding of the local political economy within which clans

compete. Such new and emergent elites are not bound by traditional constraints, yet they utilise the networks and connections of clan to mobilise for their own purposes (Samatar 2007).

We can therefore summarise this literature as being dominated by two firmly opposed interpretations of Somali clan identity, one that sees the traditional character of the clan as being central to conflict and conflict prevention, the other that sees the clan as a modernised, even progressive institution, whose development has moved far beyond traditional norms through a highly adaptive and responsive system of mobilisation and patronage. These two interpretations can be usefully summarised:

**The ‘primordialist’ view:** An established ethnographic description that sees traditional practices as continuing to be ‘normative’ in Somali society, as posited by Lewis. Here clans are seen as essentially forming interests groups that are conflictual, but that such conflict is then mediated and moderated by other traditional practices, especially *Xeer* and *Diya*. By this account, conflict has increased and become entrenched where the balancing clan-based traditional practices have been allowed to wane. Reassert traditional authority and traditional practice within clans, the argument therefore runs, and you will better control and more easily prevent conflict.

**The ‘modernist’ view:** An alternative view of clan socialisation and clan politics that sees ‘new influences’, including the mobilisation of modern politics, the impacts of new economic opportunities, and changing patterns of mobility and settlement, as having fundamentally altered relationships within and between clans, transforming the understanding of traditional ‘norms’ and bringing into play a whole new set of motivations and goals. In this model, the clan has been transforming with the Somali political economy, leaving behind ‘traditional’ practices that are no longer functional. Conflict is therefore **not** the product of traditional clan relations, or the failure of traditional authority within and between clans, but might instead be located in the modern politics of patronage in which clans play a role.

### 2.2.3 The Clan as Modern Politics in a ‘Failed’ State

Let us then explore the literature to develop the ‘modernist’ view a little further. Besteman (1999) describes clan-dependent depictions of Somalis as “cartoon-like images of primordial man: unable to break out of their destructive spiral of ancient clan rivalries, loyalties and bloodshed” (Besteman 1999: 4, for similar observations, see Ahmed 1999; Bradbury 2008; Drysdale 1994). While denying the idea that there is a direct similarity between traditional Somali social systems and those that prevail in modern Somalia, she also describes the role of other elements of modern Somali culture. Besteman highlights the importance of racialized status, of regional identities, and the control of resources and markets as key contributory factors in the dissolution of the state in 1991 and the troubles that followed. Hence, her analysis demotes lineage, clan and blood-ties as the most important influences on Somali social stability, instead finding the important cleavages to be shaped by questions of race, class, region, status, occupation and language.

In order to show the relative influence of these factors in Somalia, Besteman (1998) traces the recent history of people living in the Gosha area of the Juba valley, in southern Somalia. People here were never privileged by clan affiliation, but were instead characterised as slaves and untouchables according to local Somali understandings. However, they still managed to use the Somali clan structure to their own ends. In successfully illustrating how Gosha people managed to

use non-patrilineal means to assert themselves, Besteman draws us to ask if other Somalis who hold more senior positions in the clan system may be able to use these other sources of capital in similar ways. The burden of the Besteman argument, then, is not to suggest that clans, lineage and *xeer* associations, even in the modern form, are not important, but rather to point out that they can be dominated and trumped by other forces (Besteman 1998, and Lewis 1993; see also Lewis 2004 and Lewis 1998b).

This broader view of Somalia's social institutions and cultural norms also finds favour with other academics who have examined Somali society at the lowest levels. Scholars such as Little (2003) and Simons (1995), for example, again both anthropologists, have highlighted the importance of a variety of social structures and norms in regulating and enriching clan culture. Little (2003), in particular, provides a highly detailed and wonderfully nuanced account of the rejuvenation of the 'stateless' Somali economy, showing how economic opportunism, driven first by survival and then by accumulation, has mobilised very modern relationships to build trust and loyalty and to enable economic activity. The clan stands at the centre of these new relationships. These experiences have immeasurably strengthened the economic and political significance of the clan.

## **2.2.4 Clan Identity in Stateless Somalia: A Summary**

In summary, then:

An understanding of clan affiliation – and the responsibilities that come with it – is essential in comprehending the violence that has existed in Somalia since the fall of the Barre government.

Clans are geographically distributed over the country and ties and relations between these different groups are complex and fluid.

While elements of traditional *xeer* and *diya* practices are still present in the current clan system, these and other elements of traditional Somali culture have been eroded since colonialism (i.e., since the 1960s), and the clan relations that exist now are not mediated by the normative prescriptions of the past.

Clans and patrilineality have transformed in the modern context, to reflect a broad set of influences prevailing in present-day Somali culture that work upon and through clan structures. Race, class, economic wealth, language, and access to resources mediate and interact through clan relations to organise Somali society.

## **2.3 Islam in Somalia – 'A Veil Lightly Worn'**

The role of religion interacts with clan structure, nationalism and Islamic unity, to define the possibilities and limitations of fundamentalism in Somalia. If bemoaning the violence and disorder in Somalia is the most popular form of commentary on this 'failed state', surely the next most common refrain is to ask how this could have happened in a country where the culture is so homogenous? Religion is regularly presented as a feature of a united Somali culture, shared by almost everyone in the country. In order to address this assumption, we must first ask to what degree there is a common perception of Islam in Somalia, and what potential there is for a shared religious viewpoint to provide a basis for political action?

We must begin this section by acknowledging that Somali Islam, indeed Islam in eastern Africa and the Horn as a whole, remains a subject that requires further development. Until the focus on the region because of perceived terrorist threats since the end of the 1990s, Islam here attracted little scholarly interest (for an historiography, see Abdullahi 2001; Lewis 1998b; Oded 2008; and, Samatar 1992). The standard interpretation of Somali Islam available to us is once again provided by Lewis (2003), whose writings remain the most widely read account. Lewis describes the dominant Sufi mystical brotherhoods (*turuq*, sing. *tariqa*) prevalent in Sunni Somalia and found throughout the Muslim world. Three main denominations are to be found in Somalia: the *Qadiriya*; the *Ahmadiya*; and the *Ahmadiya* derivative, the *Salihya* (Oded 2008).

### 2.3.1 Sufi Mystical Brotherhoods

While the *Ahmadiya* is the most popular movement, the *Salihya* is notable for its genesis and early development, having been associated with Sayyid Muhammad Abdille Hassan ('The Mad Mullah' to his British enemies) and his fight against colonialism at the end of the nineteenth century (Samatar 1982; Samatar 1992; Beachey 1990). Lewis (1994) notes that while these *turuq* have been fully integrated into Somali religious culture, with their founders having been assimilated into the local calendar of saints, only a relatively small percentage of Somalis are formally initiated into these orders.

Saints are peculiarly important in Somali Islam. The founders of these *turuq* number amongst the pantheon of Somali Islamic saints, which also features the originators of clan families like the Darod and Isaaq, and local heroic figures such as Sharif Yusuf Al-Qoniin, a Muslim missionary who visited Somalia in the twelfth century. Common to all these individuals are saintly shrines, found dotted all around the country. The shrines provide destinations for visiting pilgrims (Lewis 1998b), and those linked with clan founders are viewed as being especially significant as symbols of clan unity and territoriality. Somali saints and their deeds are also celebrated through the rich medium of poetry and song, which has ensured that their stories survive to inform aspects of modern Somali identity (Samatar 1982).

While for the *Qadiriya*, the *Ahmadiya* and, more importantly, many non-affiliated Muslim Somalis, the veneration of saints was an important aspect of worship, Sayyid Muhammad Salih, the original leader of the *Salihya* expressed fundamentalist contempt for the Somali cult of saints. Hostility between the *Qadiriya* and the *Ahmadiya* escalated over this issue with each faction declaring the other to be infidels. The *Qadiriya* were also accused of siding with the British as the 'Dervish War' began in the 1890s (Beachey 1990; Samatar 1992) – a slur from which they have never quite escaped. The clashes between *Salihya* guerrillas and British forces during this first war of resistance to colonial incursion are of particular note, given that they feature strongly in Somali poetry and oral history, with Sayyid himself having contributed many of the most famous verses (Samatar 1982). This jihad against invaders is perceived as a struggle against infidels and a watershed in the emergence of a stronger consciousness among Somali Muslims, but even earlier in the nineteenth century there had been efforts to impose more fundamentalist forms of Islam in Somalia. A local Bardera sheikh initiated a series of harsh fundamentalist reforms in 1819, for example, whereby folk-dancing was proscribed, tobacco was banned and women were forced to wear the veil. These reforms eventually met severe resistance and were overthrown by a local leader, but the example illustrates the long running struggles within Islam in Somalia (Lewis 2003). Hence, even before tales of the 'Mad Mullah' resounded through the colonial British press and Somali oral poetry, battles were being fought here over acceptable forms of Islam.



### 2.3.2 Islam and Foreign Invaders

While sequential waves of Wahhabist influence have swept over the Horn of eastern Africa from Saudi Arabia and the Yemeni peninsula over many years past since the early nineteenth century, it has been noted by Menkhaus (2002) that periods of stronger support for Islamic fundamentalism in Somalia have tended to coincide with a threat of foreign invasion (see also de Waal 2004). But there is no historical evidence to suggest that Wahhabism in any form has ever represented a sustained movement among Somalis. In contrast, Menkhaus (2002, 2007) carefully details how Islam has been used and misused as a mobilisation tool in efforts to resist first British colonialism, then ‘Abyssinian Imperialism’, and most recently the US backed Ethiopian invasion. Further, he highlights the fact that the areas with the most potent forms of Somali Islamism are outside the country – in Ogadeni Ethiopia and Northern Kenya – in precisely those places where Somalis feel threatened or oppressed by other cultures and religions (Marchal 2009; for other discussion of al-Shabaab, see Barnes & Hassan 2007; CTC 2007; Harnisch 2010; HRW 2010; ICG 2005c, 2010; Shinn 2004; and, Terdman 2008).

In fact, contrary to the impression given by much of the recent media coverage of Harakat al-Shabaab, Menkhaus (2002) points out that popular practice of Islam in Somalia is far from fundamentalist and is best thought of as “a veil lightly worn.” He reminds us that women among Somalis have traditionally not been veiled; *xeer* customary law has superseded *shari’a*; veneration of saints is still a key part of Somali religious practice; Somali politics has tended to be secular; and that Somalis are not scrupulous in their religious observance of Islam. For the most part, then, the exigencies of Somali pastoral life have ensured that pragmatism has ruled over religious doctrine (Abdullahi 2001).

The general basics of Somali Islam might thus be summarised:

While the Somali version of Islam has witnessed waves of fundamentalist reform, then, these periods of tension did not eliminate the uniquely Somali elements of religious practices in Somalia.

Occasional waves of fundamentalism did not erase the influence of other cultural elements that have been successfully combined with Somali Islam over the long duree.

Periods of united and exaggerated fundamentalism have usually occurred only in conditions where Somalis have perceived a foreign threat.

Traditional religious practice in Somalia is identifiable by its mysticism, the role of saints and non-Koranic stories and also its proven flexibility and plurality in existing with other doctrinally opposed aspects of Somali society.

Mysticism and local features in religious practice exist even in the current upsurge of fundamentalism and serve as brakes on the power of emergent Islamist groups.

### 2.3.3 The New Politics of Islam: Al-Shabaab and Fundamentalism

But deeper history in Somalia is not necessarily a good guide to how things are now. More recent events have dramatically reshaped the politics of Islam and clan. For Menkhaus (2002), the modern era of political Islam among Somalis began in the 1970s. As that decade drew to a close, Barre’s regime had clearly failed in its attempts to establish a fair, transparent, secular government and the spiralling economy had ensured that a rising number of young men were leaving the country to find work in the Arab states. In addition to initiating and developing

remittance networks to send money to their families in Somalia (Ahmed 2000; Hammond 2005; and, Lindley 2007, 2010), these workers also brought home new fundamentalist ideas.

By the late 1980s, Islamic study groups and Muslim Brotherhood cells were active in Mogadishu and around the country (Marchal 2009). As Barre's government finally collapsed, and armed factions struggled between themselves to gain control of key resources, these cells made several attempts to gain territory. In some cases they were unsuccessful, losing the port town of Bosaso to the Somalia Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF), for example. In others, however, they were victorious, most notably in the southern town of Luuq, which they managed to hold and administer for a period of five years. Writing before the expansion of the Islamic courts in 2006, Menkhaus (2002) and de Waal (2004) both used this particular example to ask what might happen under strict Islamic rule should a wider fundamentalist authority be established? Menkhaus's findings for this case are prescient, with many of the noted forms of control used in Luuq to be seen in the rise of the Islamic Courts which would later come to prominence (Barnes & Hassan 2007). The control of Luuq witnessed the banning of *qaat* (*khat*, *mirra*) and tobacco, while women were forced to wear veils (on *khat*, see Anderson et al. 2007). Generally, security improved dramatically in Luuq and NGOs were happy to work there as conditions were safer.

Importantly however, the new Islamist administration in Luuq ran into difficulties when the 'outsider' members of the town's local authority – members of clans drawn to Luuq by their affiliation to this particular brand of political Islam – began to be resented by the locally dominant clan, the Marehan. Points of friction over the management of resources and allocations in the town were exploited by a secular Marehan faction that sought to reduce Islamist influence in Luuq and to regain control for themselves. Not only does this example indicate the contested nature of Islam among Somalis, it also illustrates the importance of local politics in determining clan affiliations around religious initiatives. In his analysis of this case, Menkhaus highlights the fact that the fundamentalist movement in Luuq was forced to deal with precisely the same challenges posed by the modern clan structure as do secular attempts at centralisation in Mogadishu and elsewhere. In all local Somali politics, clan interests will invariably trump religious interests.

The French political scientist Roland Marchal (2009) has also examined the origins of the recent wave of fundamentalism in Somalia, and he too stresses the importance of local politics. Like Menkhaus, Marchal sees the early 1990s as a time of Islamic resurgence in Somalia. Marchal looks in detail at the case of the group known as *al-Itihaad al-Islaamiyya* (Islamic Unity), and their attempts to set up *shari'a* courts in Mogadishu. A group that embraced many clans, and even welcomed foreigners into its ranks, *al-Itihaad al-Islaamiyya* was one of the earliest militias to emerge as the Barre state collapsed (Compagnon 1998). Despite considerable support for the measures they sought to impose, bringing a degree of order to the chaos of Mogadishu, *al-Itihaad al-Islaamiyya* ultimately failed in this effort, then being chased to the south where they lost a key battle to General Mahammad Faarah Aydiid's forces at Kismayo. For Marchal, this failure was entirely due to the movement's disregard for clan, and their unwillingness to compromise with the politics of clan interests in Mogadishu and southern Somalia. Here again, as in Luuq, Islamist goals were undermined by local clan politics.

After their defeat, *al-Itihaad al-Islaamiyya* split. The smaller, fractured groups that then emerged each took a more clear alignment with the clan structure based on the geographical regions in which they were based. Developing his point on the overriding significance of clan politics, Marchal then highlights important ideological differences in the groups that emerged from the

split. The *al-Itihaad* splinter group, which settled in the Ethiopian Ogaden, was the most extremist and also the most prone to look to outside support from al-Qaeda (Le Sage 2001). *Al-Itisam Kitab wal Sunna* (*Al-Itisam*) was, by contrast, more ideologically rigorous in its Islamic adherence but less extreme in its views. Marchal (2009) notes that, after 1997, al-Itisam adopted a more expansionist approach, opportunistically seeking to use the introduction of new Islamic courts into areas where they could manipulate and so influence local clan politics. For Marchal, then, like Menkhaus, accommodation with clan politics emerges as a crucial determinant of the success of any religious movement.

The imposition of forms of *shari'a* law and the administration of Islamic courts feature prominently in these cases, but it is in the city of Mogadishu that we have seen the most intense struggles around religious and clan politics. Since the 1990s, there have been a succession of attempts to establish Islamic courts in Mogadishu, often supported by business interests in the city – for whom stability and order brings very obvious advantages – but ultimately opposed and undermined by clan politics and the failure to incorporate all of the key militias. Marchal (2009) notes these tensions, but has observed a growing circumspection and accommodation with clan interests among those who wish to see *shari'a* law imposed (see also ICG 2005c; Le Sage 2002). According to Marchal, for example, *al-Barakat* owner Ahmed Nuur Ali Jima'ale provided funding for the courts initiative in the late 1990s and was backed by many other businessmen (Marchal 2009; for another discussion, see Le Sage 2002). Far from being exclusionary in focus, the Islamic courts movement in Mogadishu has since then sought to build support among the different Muslim groups including the Islamists of al-Itihaad and other Salafis, but also including a number of smaller Sufi groups (Menkhaus 2002; ICG 2005b; Le Sage 2001). With the financial support of businesses and the backing of a wide variety of religious groups, the Islamic Courts movement was able to bring vastly improved security, thus gaining what some called 'performance legitimacy' (Menkhaus 2009d). These courts were eventually absorbed into the TNG created in 2000, a move that ultimately alienated the Islamist faction in the movement but at the same time weakened the courts politically.

The reasons for this failure are clear enough. As Marchal explains, the events of 11 September turned the influences on the nascent Transitional National Government (TNG) onto a primarily anti-extremism footing. The protracted struggles over control in Mogadishu of the early years of the twenty-first century thus brought about a new coalition, the Transitional Federal Government, inaugurated in 2004, that was guided by external political forces and explicitly excluded those of an Islamist persuasion. Although this was an exclusionary approach, the real difficulty for this initiative lay not in Islamic affiliations or clan politics, but the alignment that followed with the traditional Somali enemy – Ethiopia (Marchal 2009). From this time, Marchal and Menkhaus, among many other analysts, share a view that a strong Somali desire to minimise foreign influence and interest has unified disparate clans and Islamic factions alike. In this configuration, President Abdullaahi Yuusuf Ahmed swiftly came to be seen as a puppet of the west, and as a consequence the TFG rapidly lost its legitimacy.

The failure of the TFG, and the prominence of external forces in its politics, led directly to the resurgence of the Islamic courts movement after 2004 in a more militant incarnation. The Courts that had re-emerged by 2006 were reinforced by capable and well-equipped militias. The use of militias was deemed to be necessary to maintain authority in the more fraught and factionalised politics of Mogadishu after 2005, but it also represented a greater militarisation of Somalia's local politics in response to external influence. Among those supporting the Courts at this time were a number of militant Islamists, alienated from other politics and keen to use the Courts as a political

platform (see ICG 2005b; Marchal 2007, 2009; and Menkhaus 2007a, for the context). Thus, by 2006 the perceived external threat to Somali independence had become more significant in determining political affiliation than either clan or religion.

It was in these circumstances that al-Shabaab became identified with the promotion of Islamist views through the Courts movement. Until this time, the extreme views of the nascent al-Shabaab had prevented any serious alliance with those seeking to build consensus through the Union of Islamic Courts (Dagne 2010). This changed in February 2006, and its cause was, once again, the unifying impact of foreign interference. When fighting broke out between the Union of Islamic Courts and the factions supported by US and Ethiopian interests, rather naively and somewhat revealingly called the Alliance against Terrorism and the Restoration of Peace, al-Shabaab came to the rescue of those defending a Somali political identity.

For Somalis the difference between these groups was clear: the former was a local institution that had brought peace and security through tough but fair *shari'a* law; and the latter was a foreign-backed tormentor, bent on wreaking havoc in Mogadishu and introducing alien political practices and institutions. During the four months that followed, al-Shabaab cemented their own reputation by winning territory and acting efficiently to oppose foreign influence. But upon victory the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) was forced to confront the wide spectrum of political and religious views then represented within al-Shabaab. The Islamist influences that then came to the fore saw a harsh and immediate application of *hadith*, with widely reported stories of banning football and *qaat*, while brutal punishments were introduced for actions and behaviours perceived to be against Islam.

These actions and their associated rhetoric, including irredentist claims on the Ogaden and calls for global jihad, encouraged the USA to back an Ethiopian invasion in support of the TFG (Menkhaus 2009d). The invasion of December 2006 and the subsequent occupation by Ethiopian forces ultimately displaced Islamist influence and al-Shabaab from Mogadishu, and led to a series of human rights abuses (HRW 2008b; for earlier cases, Khalif & Doornbos 2002), but its overriding impact was to unify Somalis against the invaders and their supporters. By the time a new president was elected in November 2007, 700,000 people had been forced out of their homes in Mogadishu and thousands had been killed (Marchal 2009; ICG 2011).

Although al-Shabaab was then targeted by US Special Forces and lost many of its leading members as a consequence (Gordon & Mazzeti 2007) they emerged from the violence with their political agenda reinforced and affirmed. The invasion by foreign forces had given cause to jihad, opening a political space for the strengthening of fundamentalist political Islam (Marchal 2009). Within the country, many of the less belligerent members of the Union of Islamic Courts who had worked with the TFG were forced to retreat into criticism of the invasion, while al-Shabaab and its supporters were able to show that their ideology and mandate had been the right approach to the problem. This split the factions that had been briefly united under the Union of Islamic Courts. The Ethiopian invasion hence dramatically weakened the mandate of moderates and forged unity around al-Shabaab, as a political as well as a fighting force (Menkhaus 2009d).

This coup has given al-Shabaab a temporary ascendancy, but it will be difficult to sustain. Previous experience in Somalia indicates that Islamic fundamentalism will dissipate again when the threat of foreign invasion subsides (Lewis 2003; Menkhaus 2002). The political entrepreneurs who mobilised clan issues to subvert Islamist control in Luuq (Menkhaus 2002), and the *shari'a* courts in Mogadishu (Marchal 2009), will emerge again once the external threat has been removed and al-Shabaab loses its rallying point. This perspective on the difficulties of sustaining

an Islamic ideology in Somalia's politics has even confronted al-Qaeda, whose operatives have been reported as bemoaning the difficulties in working with the many clan and cultural issues that permeate Somalia (CTC 2007). The most recent accounts of al-Shabaab's internal politics tend only to reaffirm these views that it is only a question of time before the group again splinters as key leaders separate from one another to pursue narrower political and economic interests (ICG 2010).

A further problem exists for al-Shabaab in countering and – where possible – co-opting other non-clan based groups, several of which have emerged amid the political turmoil of recent years. Small in scale, and often short-lived politically, these movements all distance themselves from al-Shabaab for one reason or another, but most often because of perceived differences in Islamic ideologies. *Hizbul Islam* is the most important of these, an insurgent group that is itself wrought with splits and political differences. Elements of Hizbul Islam fought against al-Shabaab in Kismayo, Hiran and Luuq, but eventually they were defeated and re-amalgamated into al-Shabaab. Overcoming and assimilating such forces may speak to the increased power of al-Shabaab, but other Sufi militias have been more resolute in their opposition to al-Shabaab. *Ahlul Sunna wa'l Jama'ah*, for example, composed of an amalgam of hard-line Sufis and moderates, was formed in reaction to al-Shabaab's reported destruction of sacred pilgrimage sites associated with traditional Somali saints. Ahlul Sunna wa'l Jama'ah thus appeals to the local character of Somali Islam, rejecting globalising tendencies. They have achieved notable victories over al-Shabaab in recent fighting and now support the TFG, with many of their members holding powerful positions in the government (ICG 2011).

Radical Islam in Somali can therefore have its peculiarly local manifestations, as well as being part of wider global jihad. Thus, while al-Shabaab is successful in portraying the new TFG as a puppet of Ethiopia and the West, propped up by foreign forces, they will continue to receive the backing of locals and their clan leaders who perceive an existential national threat. If, however, the current conflict is successfully depicted as a battle between an imported and extreme Wahabbism and a moderate and culturally relevant Somali Sufism, al-Shabaab may lose support.

## **2.4 Conclusion: Islam, Clans and Militia Recruitment**

'Lineage polarisation is a product of competing enterprises and not their cause'  
(Compagnon 1998: 84; see also, Adam 1992, and for a general overview, Reno 1999)

Let us begin this concluding section by briefly reviewing our findings from the literature review relating to clan identity and religious affiliations.

The collapse of state institutions in Somalia at the end of the 1980s consolidated an already apparent trend toward new forms of political and economic mobilisation that had been evident since the 1960s. Older and more traditional cultural drivers of affiliation were not dismissed or rejected, but became less significant as political leaders competed with one another to secure scarce resources and develop sustainable enterprises in a hostile and unstable political environment. Somalia's state failure thus accelerated the trend toward 'modernist' approaches to mobilisation and affiliations (Little 2003 offers the best overview of what this meant in practice; see also, Ahmed 1995; Besteman & Cassanelli 1996).

We have provided an analysis of the literature to demonstrate that both clan and religion are used in mobilisation, and that both remain important in determining affiliations. However, the evidence suggests that while clan relationships have been adapted and transformed to comply more readily with new and emerging enterprises, religion has been deployed more narrowly to address the question of foreign intervention. While clan relations are therefore evolving and consolidating in new ways that are likely to have a sustained impact, religious affiliation appears more temporary and contingent. The local characteristics of Somali Islam remain strong, and there is little if any evidence that implies the consolidation of more radicalised notions of Islamic activism.

What role, then, do clan and Islamic identity have in militia recruitment? It must be acknowledged that there is a paucity of literature directly on this question, and what is available is fragmentary and only based upon very limited evidence. However, several themes do emerge clearly and a trajectory of travel can be identified in the way that militias have operated over the past two decades.

There was much interest in the emergence of militias at the time of the collapse of the Somali state in 1991, and some of the earliest studies produced at this time remain instructive. The path-breaking study is to be found in the work of Compagnon (1998), who emphasised the critical importance of clan in the formation of the various militia that rapidly formed as Barre's state collapsed. Compagnon linked this to the manner in which the Barre state had used the clan system in its own military organisation, and in determining its resource allocations, but he also saw the role of the political elite in 'retreating' into the clan as a way of countering the failing 'national project' as being crucial. Writing in 1998, Compagnon identified more than 20 armed groups that had been active since 1991, each one claiming its base in specific clans. But in Compagnon's interpretation, these groups were by no means fixed: instead, "clan-based political support is constantly shifting" depending upon the kind and extent of enterprise that political leaders were seeking to pursue. Clan was the basic unit of engagement in the formation of a militia, then, but the scope of this depended upon contingency and opportunity. As Compagnon concludes: "With the emergence of new factions and the decay of others, the interplay of clanism and political entrepreneurship remains the creative force behind factionalism" (Compagnon 1998: 90).

But these struggles were as often within clans as between them. A major element of conflict in Somalia by the end of the 1990s had come to revolve around internal competition within larger clans, especially the Hawiye and Darood (Menkhaus 2003a). Menkhaus sees this as being part of a longer-term process in which conflict devolved to "descending levels of clan lineage" – that is to say that sub-clans and sub-sub-clans have increasingly become the units of operation for armed groups. By 2003, for example, the Rahanweyn were fighting among themselves, as were the Marehan in Gedo region. Menkhaus notes that this devolution of conflict to lower lineage levels meant that warfare became more localised and more random, but also shorter-lived and less deadly (Ibid.: 410-411). By 2003, factions were profiting less from war and banditry and more from commerce and service businesses that required a more stable and predictable operating environment (Ibid.). There were pressures to contain violence, and the capacity of clans or their sub-factions to 'discipline' one another by enforcing traditional sanctions for transgressions remained important (Marchal 2000). 'Primordialist' and 'modernist' practices continued side by side.

To illustrate this process, Le Sage (2002) has provided details of the way in which local interests shaped the factionalism of clan activity around Mogadishu before 2002. Here local business interests came together to support the TNG, driven by a small clique of Hawiye traders and property owners, who were all in some way linked to “lucrative sectors of food aid transport, remittance banking, telecommunications, construction, or management of small beach ports near Mogadishu” (Le Sage 2002: 136). The symbiosis between politics and economic interests for this group included the provision of ‘security services’ (i.e., the running of militias) in support of the TNG at this time. This was not a system that was exclusively controlled by Hawiye interests, but a core group of Hawiye sub-clan leaders collaborated together in operating these businesses and services.<sup>1</sup>

This pattern of local interests shifted once again from 2006, with the occupying forces of Ethiopia generating a reaction among Somali clans that restored greater unity and led to consolidation. This was both a political reaction against foreign incursion, and a rally to religion – with the defence of Islam being stressed in a resurgence of Sufi movements (Menkhaus 2009b). Prior to this invasion, because of the restoration of law and order in and around Mogadishu and the improvement of conditions for commerce, the Union of Islamic Courts had won wide support from war-weary Somalis even though they did not embrace radical Islam. But this improvement in security was then undermined by squabbles within the UIC, with Hawiye clan interests being pitted against the politics of both Islamist moderates and the “confrontational jihadists” of the al-Shabaab militia (Barnes & Hassan 2007; Menkhaus 2009b: 225; by then, private security was also a major feature: see Hansen 2008). Radical religion and clan interests did not sit easily together, but the immediacy of the Ethiopian threat drove a growing number of younger recruits into the arms of the militants such as al-Shabaab regardless of clan affiliations.

Lastly, it is surely helpful to consider how our understandings of clan and religious identity among Somali communities within eastern Africa might relate to the wider literature on recruitment to radical and militant Somali politics internationally. Ironically, perhaps, there has been more written on the influence and recruitment of Somali militants in the West than there has within greater Somalia itself. This body of work has given rise to concerns about the place of Somalia in global jihad (Roy 2008; Sageman 2004, 2008). However, the key findings from this research are deeply ambiguous. Three central points can be noted:

Firstly, it is broadly agreed that there is a general perception among radicalised populations that Islam is under attack by the West. Commentators argue over the centrality of this perception – whether it is a recurrent theme or a causal logic – **but** it seems to be an assumption that applies to the Somali case.

Second, it is agreed that education, wealth, and degree of integration are all key factors in determining affiliations to radicalisation and global jihad – **but**, there is dispute as to how these factors operate. Is it affluence or poverty which causes Muslims to take up arms? Is global jihad more attractive to the uneducated, or to the educated elite? Are Muslims more likely to take up the fundamentalist cause if they have been too well integrated into host societies, and therefore their identity diminished, or do they radicalise because they have been excluded by host societies?

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<sup>1</sup> The strong role of clan affiliation in the politics of Mogadishu has recently become entrenched in the proposals for the building of consensus politics, with proposals for a clan quota system for representation and political office. As the ICG has commented, this has “in practice locked many competent people out of office, perpetuated clan chauvinism and prevented the emergence of issue-based politics” (ICG 2011: 9). For the earliest manifestation of these practices, see Marchal 1996, 1997.

Third, is recruitment to the radical cause driven by **dispositional** or **situational** factors? The emphasis on profiling techniques has led to implicit assumptions that a disposition toward activism can be identified, while more variable situational factors (geographic location, the operation of kinship networks, neighbourhood factors) have not been as thoroughly investigated – perhaps because they require a deeper understanding of cultural and social factors.

How far do such factors affect the mobilisation of recruitment among Somali within eastern Africa, and what role does clan and Islamic affiliations play in this process? The Congressional Research Service's 'Countering Terrorism in East Africa: The US Response' (Ploch 2010) provides a cogent summary of these points, with specific reference to the Somali case.

The report finds that among the socio-economic factors, both al-Shabaab and al-Qaeda use the "victimisation narrative" to recruit and sustain support. Within Somalia, this focuses upon the "foreign invader" trope. In Kenya, this works by articulating a "sense of social, cultural, political and economic exclusion" felt by the country's Muslims. The report states that in the places where the Muslim population is concentrated, social services have historically been weaker than elsewhere in the country. This disadvantage was exacerbated when many of the Islamic charities providing social services to these areas were closed in the wake of the bombing of the US embassy in 1998 and the attack of 11 September. Somalis in Kenya typically express frustrations emerging from a lack of job opportunities and a sense of exclusion from the mainstream political economy. Male youth are said to be especially disaffected, a factor identified as important for al-Shabaab recruitment in particular (Hansen 2008; Gartenstein-Ross 2009). Where economic deprivation is most extreme, as in the towns close to the Somalia border where large refugee communities have congregated, recruitment is linked to the provision of some kind of social service and basic protection. Other writers have also noted that in the towns of Somalia, including Mogadishu and Kismayu, the provision of social goods has been a key incentive for youth to join radical movements such as al-Shabaab (Le Sage 2001; Marchal 2009).

In terms of cultural and political drivers, there are also seen to be connections between global drivers of radicalism and more local factors in the perceptions of recruits. By linking al-Shabaab's struggle in Somalia to a broader war, and engaging the narratives of 'occupation' and 'liberation' in Iraq and Afghanistan, recruits are encouraged to see themselves as part of a global insurrection. In eastern Africa this can also be linked to the history of Muslim struggles against foreign incursions – hence, Ethiopia is configured as a Christian invading force backed by a far-off power and al-Shabaab as the retaliating Muslim armies, and much is made of the glorious history of Islamic rebellion against colonialism (Samatar 1992; Barnes 2006; Beachey 1990).

Domestic counter-terrorism tactics are also recognised as having too often targeted and alienated Muslim communities in eastern Africa (for an excellent summary, see Lind 2010; CTC 2007). With both the Ethiopian and Kenyan governments accused of human rights abuses against Muslims in general and Somali Muslims in particular, this fosters a robust popular politics that views Somalia and the Somali as 'victims' (HRW 2008a, 2008b, 2010; Menkhaus 2010). These points are developed in a more comprehensive review of motivations for extremist violence provided in two USAID documents, which highlight the importance of social networks in drawing youth into violent politics, often through connections to radicalised preachers at particular mosques, or through family members who are themselves already radicalised (USAID 2009a, 2009b). Little is known of how extremist groups interact with established non-violent places of worship in Somalia, and even in Kenya the 'politics of the mosque' has hardly been



studied (Oded 2008). A further point pertains to intimidation by extremist groups and forced mobilisation of otherwise unwilling recruits. In Somalia, anecdotal evidence would suggest that this has happened in the Juba valley, where al-Shabaab is reported to have recruited by coercion among local Bantu populations (Aidan Hartley, personal correspondence, March 2011; Ken Menkhaus, personal correspondence, March 2011).

Such general and broadly based considerations of recruitment of militias in the context of extremist politics may have a bearing on the Somali case, but they are likely to be less important than local factors. The modalities of clan mobilisation or of religious affiliation in the face of foreign invasion need to be better understood within Somalia and in neighbouring Kenya, and both require further research if the key drivers are to be properly appreciated:

What is the role of local mosques and non-political religious movements?

How do the social networks operate between different locations in the region, and how does locality affect clan relations?

What are the economic opportunities and incentives presented to recruits?

To what degree are al-Shabaab and other radical groups successful in offering social services?

Until these questions can be addressed, analysis of recruitment in East Africa will remain all too speculative.

## 3 Clan and Islamic Identity in Somalia

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### 3.1 Introduction

Somali national identity is rooted in the memory of “greater Somalia,” the sweeping pre-colonial ethnic territory of the Somalis (which stretched from the northern region of Kenya, through Ethiopia’s Ogaden, to the coast), and in the Somalis’ strong sense of ethnic, religious and linguistic unity. Somalia, whose residents share one language, ethnicity and religion, was once hailed as the most unified state in Africa. The clan system, and the practice of pastoral democracy, is a fundamental part of the Somalis’ shared cultural heritage. Somali clan identity is deeply rooted and emotional, springing both from pragmatic self-interest and, after decades of brutal clan-based violence, a shared sense of victimhood and grievance.

After twenty years of anarchy, Somalia has few functioning institutions. The clan system has filled the governance vacuum, and now provides the foundation for all political, economic and social transactions. The Somalis resent this arrangement – when polled, they express unambiguous and universal opposition to “clannism,” regarding it as a perversion of Somali culture, a vicious form of tribalism, and a product of the country’s extended poverty and social collapse.

Polling suggests that the Somalis are actively seeking an alternative social order and that they regard obedience to Islam, and to the Muslim *shari’a* law in particular, as the most promising means of resolving the Somali crisis. But the re-emergence of a surprisingly diverse range of Islamist opposition movements in Somalia – from the radical al-Shabaab militia to the moderate Ahlu Sunna wa’al Jamaa – has failed to capture the public’s imagination or loyalty.

The venality of the Somali radicals and the age-old rivalries of the clan system are only partly to blame for the failure of Islam to provide a workable alternative to anarchy. More fundamentally, the Somalis are dissatisfied with the ideologies being offered by the various Islamist factions. The Somali identity is deeply Muslim, but that Muslim identity is also uniquely *Somali*. And any Muslim practice that strikes the public as “unSomali,” “foreign” or “Arab” has, historically, been rejected by the public. Despite al-Shabaab’s utility as a resistance movement opposed to the foreign occupation of Somalia, or Ahlu Sunna wa’al Jama’s utility as a bulwark against al Shabaab, their reliance on foreign funding has struck a sour note. Al Shabaab’s efforts to unite Somalis under *shari’a* law have been fatally undermined by the imposition of harsh Salafist practices. Until some version of political Islam can be harmonized with Somali culture, it is unlikely to be a successful vehicle for social or political transformation.

### 3.2 Somali Clan Identity

#### 3.2.1 The Structure of the Clan System

In 1961, I.M. Lewis published the first and perhaps still pre-eminent text on Somali pastoral society (Lewis 1961). It described organization of the Somali people into “clans”: extended

families organized into groups on the basis of their descent through a male genealogical line. The basic unit of the clan system is the *lineage*, a group of 500 to 1,000 individuals who are related through as many as 15 generations to a common male ancestor. For the sake of security, these lineages combine into sub-sub-clans, and sub-clans, and clans.

The Somali clan system is malleable to the point of instability, and its logic is peculiarly alien to Western sensibilities. But an unusually compact and useful description of the clan system has been offered by Virginia Luling:

“The small size of the lineage unit, while making it manageable, also makes it vulnerable; hence it never stands on its own, but exists only in association with other smaller units. Lineages are combined into larger units (generally on the basis of sharing a more remote ancestor), and those into larger ones again, in a pyramidal structure. That is to say, smaller groups may at times need to combine or ally into larger groups, which in turn united into yet larger units, and so on. However, these larger groupings will fall apart into their constituents when the situation which led them to unite alters, a process of ‘constant decomposition and recomposition’ [quoting Mohamed 1993]. Order and security are thus only achieved through the balance of opposing groups, and the effort to achieve this balance leads to the shifting political alliances that are a common feature of Somali politics. It is when the balance breaks down that conflict follows” (Luling 1997).

The organization of Somalia’s clan lineages, sub-clans and clans is immensely complex, but for practical purposes can be divided into blunt categories: the “majority” clans and the “minority” clans.

The “majority” clans are the Darod, Dir, Hawiye and Rahanweyn.<sup>2</sup> These clans share several common genealogical origin myths that trace their lineage to a common source (there are multiple and conflicting versions of the origin myths that have been handed down through the Somali oral tradition – for a good overview, see Ahmed 1995). They are traditionally pastoral, mostly nomadic, and weapons-carrying, or warrior, clans.

The importance of membership in a majority clan cannot be exaggerated. The clans to this day are the sole and exclusive provider of a wide variety of public goods. Hussein Adam has famously compared their function to the work of modern trade unions, observing that, in the absence of a functioning state, they have become the primary source of an individual’s security, social standing, judicial redress and economic opportunity (Adam 1992).

Historically, the majority clans have practiced an egalitarian form of pastoral democracy in which all adult males were entitled by right to participate as equals in political and decision-making processes. Within this system, intra-clan disputes were governed and resolved by formal

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<sup>2</sup> The Rahanweyn are also commonly known as the Digil/Mirifle. Readers should note that the Rahanweyn, though considered a “major” clan family, do still occupy a second-tier status in the Somali social system. While the Darod, Dir and Hawiye clans are exclusively nomadic pastoralists, the Rahanweyn are agro-pastoralists that both farm and keep animals. Farming is considered a low-caste occupation; and the Rahanweyn have also developed a separate dialect that renders them distinguishable from other Somalis. But the Rahanweyn are historically a weapons-carrying clan and maintain one of Somalia’s largest and most powerful clan militia forces.

traditional practices involving the temporary election of leaders, usually elders, to serve as spokesmen and mediators for the clan during specific disputes. These elders enjoyed an elevated social status but could be deposed by clan consensus at any time their conduct was found unsatisfactory, and elders therefore conducted themselves carefully and with an eye to the common good.

By contrast, Somalia's minority clans – which may today comprise as much as a third of Somalia's population (UN OCHA Somalia 2002) – suffered painful exclusions and servitude. The Somali "minority" clans are the Bantu, a large group of southern riverine farmers whose lineage is believed to pre-date that of the majority clans; the Benadiri, a mercantile class of Arabian descent; and a group of several trade-practicing clans known collectively (and pejoratively) as the *migdin*. There is also a very small group of religious minorities, including Christians and Muslim sects, who continue to reside in Somalia. Each of these minority clans is considered "untouchable" or "unclean" by the majority clans; even in contemporary Somali society, they suffer profound discrimination, social ostracism, and abuse, and are still virtually excluded from political participation, intermarriage and employment.

In traditional Somali society (and in many parts of Somalia today), there was no impartial justice system, and individuals depended upon their clan militias to provide redress for any wrongs committed against clan members. Majority clan members possessed militias; minority clans, whose members have historically practiced unarmed and therefore disadvantageous trades (such as shoemaking and building), do not. Minority rights' advocate Martin Hill has argued that in a culture where might makes right, the impact of living unarmed has been profound: the minorities' historical lack of clan militia has effectively excluded them from access to the Somali justice system – a reality encapsulated in the Somali expression *looma-aaran*, meaning "no-one will avenge your death."<sup>3</sup>

Other shortcomings of the traditional clan system are painfully visible in Somalia's modern conflict. The traditional clan system lacks a concept of individual responsibility. The responsibility for redressing criminal acts and for punishing wrongdoers was instead borne collectively by the clan. Reparation for murders committed required blood payments, or *diyya*, which might have required the murderer's lineage to pay a certain number of cattle or camel, or even to take responsibility for executing the criminal. Traditional culture also involved the celebration of violent conquest in poetry and song, and conferred honor, pride and material benefits on warriors, especially those who had successfully stolen camel from rival clans. (The Somali Abdalla Omar Mansur has written that the Somali lust for camels is so intense that he considers animals "the cause of perpetual conflict and serious clan warfare in the countryside" (Mansur 1995a). Warfare was thus inherent in the clan system and was an acceptable form of resolving conflicts between clans. (In fact, it may have been the only option: there are no traditional mechanisms for inter-clan conflict resolution.)

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<sup>3</sup> The discrimination faced by the minority clans is richly documented by Hill 2010. To be fair, other scholars may dispute this thesis. For example, Maria Brons has argued that the primary explanation for the discrimination visited on the minority clans is the Somalis' celebration of nomadic culture and their parallel disdain for sedentary life; see Brons 2001. It is also worth noting that the traditional conflict resolution mechanisms did provide some inadequate "legal" protections for weaker clans, primarily through traditional practices of negotiating access to land and water (known in Somali as *deegan*). Somali culture also included strong protections for women, children and the elderly, who were carefully shielded from warfare.

Some observers have also suggested that the Somali practice of egalitarian democracy, which granted an unrestricted political voice to every male member of the clan, has had adverse consequences. The United States Institute of Peace, for example, notes that an “older source of discord” in Somalia “is the profound Somali individualism...rooted in the clan structure” (Adam & Ford 1998).<sup>4</sup>

### **3.2.2 The Origins of Clan Conflict**

#### **3.2.2.1 The Siad Barre regime**

Western descriptions of the Somali conflict generally begin with the collapse of the Siad Barre regime and Somalia’s subsequent descent into civil war and anarchy. The Somalis, however, trace the origins of Somalia’s violent clan conflicts to the abuses of Siad Barre’s military dictatorship and his deliberate exploitation of a ‘divide and conquer’ strategy that pitted one clan against the other as rivals for state spoils.

Alex de Waal, in an essay titled “Class and Society in a Stateless Somalia”, has written that one of the primary legacies of the Siad Barre regime is a deep and unspoken conflict between a class of “farmers,” a group of indigenous, minority landholders with an historical ownership claim on the land but no military power, and the “landowners,” Barre’s political elite, who were awarded large tracts of lands as political spoils. De Waal notes that to this day, local residents of these lands are afraid to identify these illegitimate “landowners” for fear of violent retaliation – and worse, he notes that in many cases the “landowners” who benefitted most from Siad Barre’s land re-allocations were the clan elders who had previously been charged with mediating conflicts and keeping the peace between and within the clans (de Waal 2007). The complicity of the elders in the Siad Barre regime’s abuses has tarnished the public’s perception of clan authority beyond repair, and severely diminished the capacity of clan elders to intervene in conflicts or to promote local governance. The impact on law and order in subsequent years has been profound. But an even great harm, de Waal points out, is the impossibility of any meaningful political reconciliation in Somalia until the question of land ownership has been comprehensively resolved (Ibid.)

The U.S. Institute of Peace has been more categorical in its assessment of the Siad Barre regime. Barre was so brutal and so generally destructive of Somali culture, USIP finds, that “all Somalis now hold a deep-seated fear and distrust of any centralized authority” (Adam & Ford 1998).

#### **3.2.2.2 The civil war**

At the end of the Cold War, foreign military backing of the Siad Barre regime ground to a halt, and the simmering hostilities between the clans exploded into civil war. For a period of several

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<sup>4</sup> The influence of the clan system on Somalia’s conflict should not, however, be exaggerated. Adam Musse Jibril, for example, has pointed out that Somali society is a compound of several cultural influences: pastoral social values (the foundation of the traditional clan system), Islamic cultural values, and European colonial-era cultural values. He notes that each of these cultural factors are clearly visible in the modern Somali justice system, in which the *xeer* (traditional law), the *shari’a* (Islamic law) and the colonial (Judeo-Christian law) coexist. And Ahmed Samatar has argued that it is colonialism, the creation of a centralized state, and the commercialization of the pastoral system that have caused the Somali clan society to transform and decay. For these and other discussions, see Samatar 1994, and Salih & Wohlgenuth 1994. DRDC Toronto CR 2011-080

years, the Somali clans perpetrated a terrible series of atrocities on each other, with the worst of the violence taking place between December 1991 and March 1992.

The long history of Somalia's clan grievances has never been adequately documented, and to foreign observers, the catastrophic violence of the civil war period is especially opaque. This is because the international community fled Somalia at the start of the civil war, and much of the violence that subsequently occurred either remains unrecorded or, in many cases, was written down years later by partisans of one faction or another. What is clear is that, prior to the civil war, the rebelling Isaaq clan of Somalia was intensively bombed by the Siad Barre regime; and that during the civil war there was a large-scale and forceful migration of the powerful Hawiye clan into Mogadishu (which was heavily occupied by the privileged Darod at that time, among many other clans, including the Hawiye) and into the fertile riverine territories of the south (which were traditionally occupied by the Rahanweyn and the minority clans). During this period, the Darod claim that some 400,000 people were either murdered or expelled from their homes in Mogadishu by Hawiye militias bent on exacting vengeance for the acts of Darod theft and brutality committed under the Siad Barre regime. This number cannot possibly be verified – nor can the legitimacy of the Darods' territorial claim on Mogadishu be assessed – but by the time the United Nations peacekeepers re-entered Somalia in 1992, possession of Mogadishu was clearly divided between two warring Hawiye subclans (the Abgal and Habr-Gedir) (author interviews with closed sources).

During the civil war period, marauding clan militias poured across southern Somalia, violently capturing territory. In many cases, the marauders captured land that had already been stolen at least once before, either during the colonial period or under Siad Barre. So it was that, in de Waal's useful terminology, the "farmers" and the "landowners" found themselves challenged by a new set of belligerents: the "liberators," who had neither an historical claim or a legal title to the land, but simply seized property and resources by force (De Waal 2007). The dispute over who really "owns" the land has never been resolved, and its tensions underlie the Somalis' ongoing resistance to the creation of a central state: the clan that captures control of the next government of Somalia will decide whether it is history, title or possession that truly determines ownership of the land (Ibid.).

### **3.2.3 Clan in Contemporary Society**

#### **3.2.3.1 The process of repair**

Miraculously, throughout the late 1990s and into the early 2000s, the Somalis did manage to begin the difficult process of social reconstruction, and they did so without land reform, a state or significant quantities of foreign aid.

Professor Kenneth Menkhaus has been an astute observer of Somalia's slow but steady progress towards normalization. He has dubbed the period between the Somali civil war and the early 2000s as a time of "cold peace," characterized by the evolution of Somalia's war economy and "conflict constituencies" into more settled, quasi-legitimate business activities (Menkhaus 2003b).

Menkhaus writes that after the civil war, many warlords stopped fighting for territory (most of which had, by that time, been decisively won or lost) and began to invest in quasi-legitimate businesses that gave them fixed assets to defend and a new need for roads and security. For the

first time since the civil war, the warlords found a reason to invest in the rule of law. The evolution of Somalia's war economy caused a gradual reduction of conflict between the clans. Cross-clan alliances, usually based on shared economic interests, became a fixture of Somali politics. Violent conflicts, when they occurred, increasingly tended to take place within subclans, rather than between them, and as a result became localized and less deadly. As previously rival clans became business partners, Somalia's remaining warlords found it harder to stoke conflict, and became both less essential to clan security and less powerful (Ibid.).

### **3.2.3.2 The restoration of traditional authority**

At the same time, some clan elders began to repair their damaged credibility as peacemakers and representatives of subclan interests. An extensive survey by the nongovernmental organization Interpeace has documented the spread of local reconciliation efforts across Somalia, Somaliland and Puntland. The Interpeace study found that, despite the dismal repeated failure of internationally-sponsored conferences to resolve Somalia's conflict, peace agreements between subclans have been widely successful, at least at the local level. Many of these peace agreements began as practical negotiations to reduce conflicts over access to grazing land and water (known traditionally as *deegan*), but when implemented, they have universally enhanced public order and decreased the incidence of violent conflict (Bradbury & Healy 2010; this study includes a worthwhile selection of essays on the efforts of modern Somalis to re-institute the better aspects of the clan system as modern conflict resolution tools).

The majority of these peace agreements have taking place at the village or municipal level. Over the last ten years, however, and throughout Somalia, a new phenomenon has emerged: that of the self-declared administration. Formal, self-declared governments have now appeared in Somalia at all levels: local, municipal, district and regional. These administrations – which include Puntland, Somaliland, Galmudug, “Sool, Sanaag and Caayn” (SSC) and “Himan and Heeb” – have been seen by a great many analysts as proof that the Somali state can indeed be reconstructed, if only from the “bottom-up.”

A rival group of observers has noted that the self-declared administrations are essentially clan fiefdoms, and perceive the rise of Somaliland in particular as an irreversible descent into clannism that may never be reversed. These individuals fear that any recognition of the “ethno-states” will prevent, not assist, in the reunification of the Somali state. In the short term, however, there is no doubt that the creation of the ethno-states has provided an unprecedented degree of stability and governance to some parts of Somalia.

#### *Warlordism*

The phenomenon of the Somali warlord has been notorious since 1992, when the United Nations was forced to send peacekeepers into Somalia to prevent the deliberate starvation of the public by warlords bent on stealing humanitarian relief to fund their armies.

French analyst Roland Marchal has written an illuminating monograph on warlordism which is worth briefly mentioning here. In it he argues that the nature of the Somali warlords' power has been consistently misunderstood by Western analysts (Marchal 2007). Western images of the warlord, he writes, have been shaped by the experiences of Liberia and Sierra Leone, and have little to do with Somalia, where figures in the mold of Charles Taylor are extraordinarily rare. Few Somali militia leaders are capable of exercising hegemonic control over their clan, and a vast

majority of warlords are actively reliant on popular support for their survival. Marchal even echoes a complaint voiced often by Somalis, that it was the international community, not the Somalis, that created and empowered the warlords:

“When the international community got involved in 1992, it worked through the promotion of traditional leaders. Not all clans have a ‘Sultan’ or a ‘Bogor’: hence these figures were created by political, business or factional entrepreneurs for the sake of getting access to foreign backing and not being (loosely) represented by others. In a number of cases, warlords emerged as the means by which a group of interests (often rallying behind the name of a clan), could make a point, get recognition from the international community (always in need of interlocutors), or show autonomy or resistance towards another warlord. The alleged blind support of clan (or sub-clan) does not correspond much to the reality” (Ibid.: 1099).

Far more dangerous than the warlords to the average Somali is the rise of a class of businessmen so powerful that they are effectively autonomous from both their clans and warlords. These businessmen are the real “powers” in Somalia; both Menkhaus and Marchal note that by far the most egregious crimes committed in Somalia are “white collar” crimes such as land grabbing and counterfeiting (which has in the past several years utterly destroyed the value of the Somali currency). The organized crime syndicates that have sprung up around Somalia’s piracy and kidnapping industries also tend to be sponsored by the business and political elite rather than by conventional clan warlords.

### **3.2.4 Somali Perceptions of the Clan System**

“It is notable that when Somalis accuse someone of ‘tribalism,’ what they are generally imputing to him is not blind atavistic loyalty, but self-interest” (Luling 1997: 293)

Somali public opinion on the clan system is virtually unanimous. A July 2010 survey by the National Democratic Institute revealed that the Somali public is profoundly dissatisfied with the clan system. The vast majority of Somalis, NDI finds:

“are inclined to think of the Somalis as one people, united by a single religion, language, culture and physical appearance, with religion being the strongest tie. Therefore, clannism is considered an affront to the idea of Somali unity and is identified as the most significant source of conflict within the country. Participants say it breeds injustice (as certain clans are marginalized), causes people to focus solely on the welfare of their clan rather than society as a whole, and creates mistrust among people. Clan is considered a “cancer” that afflicts Somali society” (Levy 2010: 6).

The survey found that Somalis express a strong desire for reconciliation and the creation of a unified state. Unfortunately, the lack of any political alternative to the clan system has meant that, despite the Somalis’ intellectual rejection of clannism as a socio-political model, it remains the foundation for almost all social, political and economic interactions.



### 3.3 Islam in Somalia's Armed Opposition

#### 3.3.1 The Role of Islam in Somali Society

It is widely recognized that in Haiti, the marriage of modern Christianity with traditional African animist beliefs has produced a unique religious practice known as *voodoo*. In the rural reaches of Somalia, the practice of Sufi Islam has been tempered not only by African pagan traditions but also by the pervasive influences of British and Italian colonial culture, producing a religion of comparable originality and complexity.

Among modern rural and village-dwelling Somalis, animal sacrifices and witchcraft are still common, as is Western music, brightly colored clothing, and the practice of Sufi mystical beliefs. Because the population is poor and largely illiterate, the teaching of Islam has remained almost entirely oral (with the exception of some formal schools and *madrassahs*), and to date there are no Somali translations of the Koran (the Arabic Koran has however been transcribed alliteratively into Somali/English characters). Arabic language skills are so rare that many Somali clerics – allegedly including the al-Shabaab leader Mukhtar Robow – are unable to recite the daily prayer. The flexibility of the Somalis' religious practice has led multiple observers to describe the Somali Muslim identity as “a veil lightly worn.”

This may not be an accurate description, as both anecdotal and quantitative evidence suggests that Somalis are deeply committed to Islam. The National Democratic Institute's July 2010 survey found, for example, that Somali polling respondents were practically unanimous in their belief that *shari'a* should form the basis of the Somali legal system, and should apply even to family matters (an area that has previously been governed by traditional law). NDI found, surprisingly, that “even traditional leaders” and members of the Kenyan diaspora shared this viewpoint (Ibid.: 8). The NDI survey also found that polling respondents across Somalia were opposed to the freedom of religion: they felt that being Somali meant being Muslim, and that Somalis should not have the right to abandon the practice of Islam. In NDI's words: “They believe that as Somalia is a Muslim country, its people must practice Islam” (Ibid.: 20).

The lack of any – let alone consistent – polling data on Somalia since the collapse of the Siad Barre regime has made it difficult to trace the evolution of Somali public opinion. There is no doubt, however, that over the years Islamic justice has played an increasingly vital role in restoring the rule of law to Somali communities, and that the Islamic *shari'a* courts have played an especially influential part in that process. Until 2006, however, when the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) took power, the authority of the *shari'a* courts was circumscribed. Their authority was local, rarely projecting beyond the village or neighborhood level, and fragile. They tended to be managed by moderate clerics and sponsored by the clan and business elite, and were therefore unlikely vehicles for social transformation (or any challenge to the status quo). They tended to be easily quashed by spoilers, and thus they tended to flourish only in areas that were already relatively peaceful. Perhaps most important, their authority rarely extended beyond clan lines: they represented “rule of law within, not between clans” (Menkhaus 2003b: 17).

#### 3.3.2 Ideology in the Somali Armed Opposition

Somalia has a long and celebrated history of religious freedom fighters. The father of Somali nationalism, Sayidd Muhammad Cabdille Hassan (or the “Mad Mullah”), led the Dervish

resistance against the colonizers in the early 1900s. And the reclamation of Islam became a cause and primary rallying point for opponents of the Siad Barre regime. Somalis have regularly gravitated to Islam and to Islamist rhetoric when they have needed a unifying force to oppose a foreign threat.

This tendency to use the language of jihad to express Somali nationalist and irredentist claims has often terrified Somalia's neighbors. These fears have mostly been exaggerated; the vast majority of Somalis are believed to be moderate practitioners of Sufi mysticism. Recently, however, harsher Sunni practices have begun to intrude on the country and in some communities have become widespread.

Since 2004 and the creation of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG), political Islam has once again emerged as a powerful vehicle for resistance in Somalia. A number of armed opposition groups have formed and are consciously attempting to exploit Somalis' strong Muslim identity as a unifying political force. In the wake of Ethiopia's invasion of Somalia, one of these groups – a jihadist youth militia called *al-Shabaab* (or *Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen*, sometimes abbreviated by scholars as “HSM”) – managed to gain widespread popularity as a resistance movement, and despite the withdrawal of Ethiopian forces, has largely succeeded in maintaining its hold on clan territories across southern Somalia.

Professor Michael Weinstein of Purdue University has carefully analyzed the rhetoric of Somalia's various armed Islamist opposition groups, and has found that their ideologies closely parallel the ideological categories found in the Arab world (Weinstein 2008a, 2008b). Al-Shabaab, the largest and most radical of the opposition groups, is a self-declared internationalist Salafist-jihadist organization that has actively recruited foreign fighters, and has openly expressed an affinity with al-Qaeda's jihadist goals. Al-Shabaab has sometimes targeted foreign aid workers and has declared the establishment of a region-wide Islamic Emirate of Somalia to be its ultimate goal. Weinstein finds this conduct and ideology to be a typical manifestation of Islamic transnationalism.

Several armed opposition groups have been associated with Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys: the Alliance for the Reliberation of Somalia – Asmara (ARS-A), Hizbul Islam (HI), and, currently, a splinter faction of al-Shabaab. Aweys' followers have joined al-Shabaab in its armed resistance to the Western-backed Transitional Federal Government and the presence of foreign troops – whether Ethiopian army or African Union peacekeeper – in Somalia. But they are more pragmatic than al-Shabaab, and have, for example, tended to welcome foreign humanitarian relief. The ARS, HI, and what is now known as the “nationalist” faction of al-Shabaab, have not endorsed the drive to establish an Islamic emirate in the Horn, and have instead expressed the desire to use *shari'a* law as a platform for Somali unification. Weinstein has categorized the groups' ideology as a form of Islamic nationalism (Ibid.).

The Islamist faction associated with the current president of Somalia, Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, was known as the Alliance for the Reliberation of Somalia – Djibouti (ARS-D) before it was incorporated into the Transitional Federal Government, and is the most moderate of the armed Islamist factions. Weinstein characterizes its tendencies as “conciliatory”, because its leaders have consistently proven amenable to power-sharing arrangements with non-Islamist forces. Weinstein points out that these are the typical tendencies of Islamic pluralism (Ibid.). (The armed Islamist movement known as *Ahlu Sunna wa'al Jama* – an umbrella movement that claims to represent all Sufi Islamist sects, has fought al-Shabaab and signed an agreement to merge its forces with the TFG – is another example of Islamic pluralism.)

Roland Marchal, in an influential essay published several years ago, argued that the use of the term “terrorism” in the Somali context has tended, unhelpfully, to obliterate the political and economic dimensions of the conflict. In this essay, he argues that the discourse of the Somali radical groups is often instrumental rather than causative (Marchal 2007): his argument suggests that al-Shabaab is not motivated to oppose the TFG because it is sympathetic to al-Qaeda, but that al-Shabaab has expressed sympathy for al-Qaeda’s goals because it is opposed to the TFG, and in pursuit of the foreign funding and resources that al-Qaeda can supply. (These benefits apparently outweigh the risks of promoting a radical Salafist ideology that is off-putting and alien to most Somalis.)

### **3.3.3 Islam and the Profit Motive**

Ashly Elliott and Georg-Sebastian Holzer have argued that al-Shabaab’s governance agenda and its moneymaking ventures “indicate a pragmatic streak that removes the Shabaab from the nihilism of the Al Qaeda model” (Elliott & Holzer 2009: 231). They point out that the United States’ preoccupation with the terror threat has been a lucrative source of military support and income for the TFG, and posit that:

“Just as the interim government made use of the language of ‘terrorism’ to garner external resources, so the Shabaab deploys the language of jihad both to attract international assistance and to provide a structure to govern. The strategy is purposive, not merely ideological” (Ibid.: 231).

Weinstein’s writings have also emphasized the impact of the profit motive on Somalia’s armed opposition groups. He notes that the local leaders of Hizbul Islam and al-Shabaab “have tended to be pragmatic Islamic nationalists, sensitive to the needs for tactical cooperation, adaptation and adjustment” (Weinstein 2008a, 2008b), and notes that though there are indeed significant ideological differences between the various Islamist factions, the most violent internecine quarrels have played out on clan lines and have often been conflicts over resources. He gives special emphasis to the ongoing warfare between the foreign leaders of al-Shabaab and the radical Ras Kamboni Brigade, which seems to have no ideological dimension whatsoever – it is simply a violent conflict over the revenues from the port of Kismayo (Weinstein 2009).

Al-Shabaab’s increasing reliance on roadblocks, extortion and profit-sharing arrangements with the pirate syndicates not only shows a willingness to ignore Islamic tenets in favor of a bottom line – it adds credence to Weinstein’s early predictions that al-Shabaab’s ideological fervor could quickly give way to a sort of clan-based “Islamist warlordism” (Ibid.).

### **3.3.4 Islamist Experiments with the Clan System**

Pragmatism has typically won out over ideological purity whenever Somalia’s Islamist movements have confronted the clan system. As Weinstein notes, Islam has never managed to succeed as a “sustained political rallying point” in Somali society. Clannism has always been a more powerful organizing force, and Islamist movements have tended to wax and wane within the parameters of the clan system (Mehkhaus 2002). The efforts of radical and jihadist groups to surmount clan cleavages have consistently failed – ironically, the clannism that has time and again defeated Western state building efforts has also effectively limited Somalia’s usefulness as an operational platform or safe haven for al-Qaeda.

#### **3.3.4.1 Al Ittihaad in Luuq, 1991 – 1992**

Menkhaus has chronicled the efforts of the notorious Somali radical Islamist movement called *al-Ittihaad al-Islamiya* (AIAI) – whose exploits in Somalia during the ‘Black Hawk down’ era are well known – to govern the Somali town of Luuq in the immediate aftermath of Siad Barre’s collapse. Menkhaus notes that when AIAI first took over Luuq, the clan composition of its leadership was the same as that of the town (which was dominated by the Darod/Marehan subclan). Later, AIAI adjusted its model and tried to implant a mixed-clan council. Both models proved unworkable: when AIAI adopted a single, majority clan identity, it became a player in local clan rivalries and was vulnerable to charges of exploiting Islam to further Marehan ambition. The mixed-clan identity fared no better, Menkhaus writes; it merely exposed AIAI to “clannish charges of being an occupying force” (Ibid.: 114). (Neither have foreign radicals attempting to work in Somalia managed to escape the clan system. During the 1990s, al-Qaeda’s foreign operatives found themselves overwhelmed by the Somalis’ hostility to foreigners and the clannish tendencies of their own local jihadist counterparts, among a plethora of other problems [CTC 2007].)

AIAI’s tenure in Luuq lasted barely more than a year. Menkhaus writes that in the latter half of the 1990s, the organization tried yet another tactic; concluding that Somalia was not yet ready for Islamic rule, the group publically disbanded, but decided to integrate individuals and cells into local communities in an effort to spread jihadist ideology through Islamic charities and relief services (Mehkhaus 2002). But this “Trojan horse” strategy also apparently failed: in a later study, Menkhaus and Andre LeSage found that by the mid-2000s, the majority of Somali Islamic charities were adhering to a progressive vision of Islam, while only a small minority of Islamic charities operated schools or mosques with a radical or anti-Western agenda. Moreover, they write:

“The ‘mainstream’ charity groups have to date enjoyed much greater levels of success and support, as their agenda resonates with the immediate concerns of local communities – namely, access to needed services and a vision of an alternative political order to the clannism, violence and state collapse which have plagued Somalia for 14 years” (LeSage & Menkhaus 2004).

Al-Ittihaad never resurfaced in Somalia.

#### **3.3.4.2 Union of Islamic Courts, July – December 2006**

But in 2006, a new and more promising Islamist model emerged: the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC). The UIC’s sudden rise to power was largely a matter of luck,<sup>5</sup> but during the first few months that it controlled Mogadishu, its governance model generated nationwide enthusiasm.

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<sup>5</sup> In 2004, the United States, with support from its allies in the United Nations, had backed the creation of the unpopular Transitional Federal Government (TFG). Its creation produced a violent, clan-based counterreaction in Mogadishu, where a radical youth militia group, al-Shabaab, developed and began assassinating TFG members and supporters. The emergence of an indigenous extremist group after years of dormancy alarmed U.S. intelligence operatives, who attempted to counter the threat by forming a counter-terror alliance with a coalition of Mogadishu warlords. When the alliance between the warlords and the Central Intelligence Agency became public, it sparked a public uprising. With broad support from the public, clan leaders and Mogadishu’s business community, a preexisting network of *shari’a* courts was

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Abdi Ismail Samatar was present in Mogadishu in late 2006 and has described the UIC's rise to power. He attributes its success to a number of factors, including the public's frustration with warlord rule and a Somali backlash against Western efforts to empower the "divisive and fraudulent" TFG. He even cites the Somalis' disenchantment with the corruption and ineffectiveness of the Nairobi "AID mafia." Interestingly, though, he does not cite the UIC's Islamist character as a deciding factor in the public's support. On the contrary, he asserts that the UIC was primarily viewed as clan-based, rather than Islamist, and that the primary challenge facing the UIC when it took power was its vulnerability to "clannist fragmentation" and its inability to "transform the clan-based identity of the Courts" into viable "faith-centered operations" (Samatar 2006b: 585; Elliott & Holzer (2009) have also identified the UIC's identity as a vehicle for Hawiye clan ambitions as the primary cause of its failure).

Clearly, the UIC never succeeded in this goal. Within a few short months, its relatively moderate governance policies had been supplanted by the preferences of its military wing, the radical al-Shabaab youth militia, which quickly imposed a series of onerous religious edicts and taxes on the city. Popular support for the movement evaporated at that time, and when the Ethiopian army invaded Somalia in December 2006, the public willingly allowed the UIC to collapse:

"The swift military defeat of the UIC suggests that, despite its positive impact on security, it was not a powerful or deeply rooted organization... real power existed neither with the UIC nor with the warlords... [but] with those who decided to back them: the clans and the business community" (Harper 2007).

Other analysts have identified the UIC's identity as a vehicle for Hawiye clan ambitions as the primary cause of failure (Milas 2007; Elliott & Holzer 2009).

#### **3.3.4.3 Al Shabaab, 2008 – present**

The Ethiopian occupation of Somalia from December 2006 to January 2009 sparked a complex insurgency in Mogadishu and provided the radical al-Shabaab youth militia with an unprecedented opportunity. It immediately adopted guerrilla tactics and within months had evolved into a popular national resistance movement. Foreign jihadists, hoping to further globalize Somalia's civil conflict, quickly funneled military and financial support to al-Shabaab. Several dozen foreign jihadists entered Somalia, importing tactics learned in the Middle East, and remote-controlled detonations, suicide bombings and other tactics associated with al-Qaeda became relatively common. Over the course of the last four years, al-Shabaab has captured and maintained a loose territorial control over most of southern Somalia (Bruton 2010).

Al-Shabaab's operational model has evolved rapidly and repeatedly during that time. From late 2006 to mid-2008, it operated exclusively as a guerrilla force, launching brief hit-and-run attacks on Ethiopian military targets and Ethiopian-held towns before melting away into the bush or dissolving into the Mogadishu crowds. But by late 2008, Weinstein notes, the strategy had clearly evolved, as al-Shabaab and its ally Hizbul Islam began to hold and administer territory. The evolution required considerable flexibility and the ability to adapt to local preferences in order to forge needed alliances with local subclans:

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eventually able to seize control of the city. This alliance was known collectively as the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) and later as the Supreme Council of Islamic Courts (SCIC). For more information, see Bruton 2010.

“rather than aspiring to institute an Islamic state based on *shari’a* law in one fell swoop, the Courts movement has now dug in at the local level, accommodating to local differences by setting up Courts administrations where it can, mixed administrations as a rule and benevolently neutral administrations where it must. This flexibility and respect for local power structures and sentiment have allowed the movement to take root and gain back a measure of [...] popular legitimacy” (Weinstein 2008a).

Al-Shabaab rarely exercised hegemonic control of territory, but in the town of Kismayo, it not only established a harsh form of *shari’a* rule, but was able to appoint a virtual foreigner – an Isaaq clan-member from Somaliland – to preside over its *shura*. By the end of 2009, as al-Shabaab gained enough military strength to challenge the clans, the imposition of the harshest tenets of *shari’a* law (including public amputations and beheadings) seemed to become al-Shabaab’s preferred norm. By May 2010, the International Crisis Group assessed that al-Shabaab’s policymaking and propaganda had been effectively centralized in the hands of a “foreign jihadist leadership cabal” that was based in Kismayo and supported by al-Qaeda. Though the movement contained strong nationalist voices, they were effectively muted by the hardliners’ control of finances (ICG 2010). In July 2010, al-Shabaab launched its first and only international terror attack, killing 76 Ugandans in the city of Kampala.

Al-Shabaab’s descent into radicalism has yet to prove fruitful. Even in May 2010, the ICG concluded that the foreign cabal’s “short governance record has been disastrous, fueling public disillusion and intensifying the pace of ideological and policy infighting within the leadership” (Ibid.: 9). The radicals’ impatience has also caused al-Shabaab to militarily overplay its hand. In September 2010, it launched a “Ramadan offensive” to expel the African Union peacekeepers from Mogadishu, and though al-Shabaab briefly made impressive strategic and territorial gains against the African Union troops, it was ultimately defeated. And the deaths of hundreds of its militiamen – most of them members of the Rahanweyn clan – has fatally aggravated clan and nationalist schisms within the movement.

In the early months of 2011, an unusually visible power struggle surfaced between al-Shabaab’s “transnational” and “nationalist” factions.<sup>6</sup> The prize at stake was the financial and military backing of a group of some two to three hundred foreign jihadist fighters. The contest effectively split al-Shabaab in two.

### 3.4 Conclusion

The impact of al-Shabaab’s latest transformation is not yet clear. The post-Ramadan leadership struggle has shifted the balance of power in favor of the nationalist faction led by Mukhtar Robow.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The “transnational” faction is led by Ahmed Abdi Godane (also known as Mukhtar Abu Zubair) and is composed largely of foreigners, and the “nationalist” faction by Mukhtar Robow Ali, (known as Abu Mansur), Fuad Mohamed Qalaf (known by his nickname, “Shongole”), Sheikh Ali Dheere and Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys.

<sup>7</sup> Godane has been removed from his position as emir, and replaced by another transnational jihadist and foreigner, Ibrahim Haji Jama (commonly known as “al-Afghani”), who has trained in Afghanistan and Kashmir. At the same time, a merger between al-Shabaab and a floundering nationalist movement called DRDC Toronto CR 2011-080

Al-Shabaab has arguably been most successful when it has moderated its ideology in response to Somali mores, and when it has worked within rather than against the clan system. Where al-Shabaab has unilaterally imposed a Salafist agenda and Sunni Muslim practices on the Somali population, its popularity has plummeted.

Dr. J. Peter Pham has speculated that the ascendancy of the nationalist platform might make al-Shabaab more palatable to Somalis and, by extension, could help al-Qaeda to cement its footprint in the Horn.<sup>8</sup> He may be correct. But al-Shabaab still has significant hurdles to overcome. The primary question facing al-Shabaab's nationalist leaders is the same question that faced the Union of Islamic Courts in July 2006: will they be able to surmount their status as clan religious elders and assume a truly nationalist identity? Currently, none of the nationalist leaders of al-Shabaab enjoy military or popular support outside of their own subclans. It remains to be seen whether Robow, Aweys or Hassan Abdullah Hersi (known as "Hassan Turki") will be perceived by the Somalis as acceptable candidates for national leadership. History suggests, however, that the Somalis will in the end perceive the rise of al-Shabaab's nationalist faction as a triumph of clannism. It is also likely that, once again, the stigma of clannism will undermine the unifying power of Islam. If so, the rise of nationalists might signal the start of a new phase in al-Shabaab's decline.

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Hizbul Islam has clearly strengthened the nationalist ranks of al-Shabaab and sent Robow's faction into the ascendancy.

<sup>8</sup> He justifies the argument by noting that Godane is formally in control of the Somaliland region; Shongole controls Puntland; Hassan Turki retains his hold on Middle and Lower Jubba; Robow continues to direct Bay and Bakol; and Ali Mohadmed Raghe (also known as "Mohamed Dheere") directs al-Shabaab operations in Mogadishu with the assistance of Fazul Abdullah Mohammed. Since Pham's publication, Sheikh Mohamed Hassan Omar (also known as "Abu-Abdirahman") has become the new regional commissioner of Banadir region. See J. Peter Pham 2011.

## **4 Clan Identity and Islamic Identity in Somalia: An Examination of Non-state Armed Groups in Regional and Sub-regional Context**

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**J. Andrew Grant (Queen's University)**

### **4.1 Introduction**

Drawing upon existing literature in the form of scholarly journal articles, academic books, think-tank and research institute reports, and other secondary documents such as newspaper articles, this paper examines clan identity and Islamic identity in Somalia with an explicit emphasis on non-state armed groups in regional and sub-regional context. Given the plurality of approaches and contributions to the overall project, this paper highlights a particular aspect of clan and Islamic identities in Somalia. The paper begins by outlining the academic literature on identity formation and identity politics, which is anchored in ethnicity studies, and then proceeds to apply these approaches to clan identity and Islamic identity in Somalia. The paper then provides an examination of non-state armed groups such as militias and pirates in coastal communities in Somalia. The main findings are summarized in the final section of the paper.

### **4.2 Approaches to Identity Formation and Identity Politics**

In Somalia and other parts of the world, identity formation is based on myriad factors that not only overlap but are also subject to perpetual change (Hashim 1997a; Hesse 2010a; Hoehne 2009; ICG 2002b; Kapteijns 2002; Luling 2006; Mahadalla 1998; Makinda 1991; Samatar 1997, 2006; Van Notten 2003). The factors most commonly associated with identity formation are based on historical, social, religious, political, regional, material and ethnic constructs. The relationship between that final factor – ethnicity – and identity formation requires some elaboration given its general importance, commonalities with clanism, and the existence of a long-standing debate on its origins. Although identity formation may be based on – or around – ethnicity, the latter does not displace the other aforementioned factors. It is important to keep this point in mind, particularly in the African context, as violent conflict across the continent is often mischaracterized by media and popular accounts as ‘tribal conflict’ or ‘tribal warfare’ (Braathen, Bøås and Saether 2000: 4). In a similar vein, scholarly work on ethnicity has a tendency to focus upon ethnic heterogeneity within a particular sub-state region, country or continental region, and then to cast this phenomenon as a causal factor that supersedes all contributing factors to the outbreak of civil war and regional instability. These approaches tend to be narrow in empirical terms, and such a singular focus overshadows the veritable importance of social, economic and political ramifications of conflict in local, regional and national communities.

The ‘primordial ethnicity thesis’ asserts a direct relationship between ethnic identity and its biological foundations whereas the ‘constructivist perspective’ holds ethnicity as something that is perceived by individuals and human groups. Donald L. Horowitz’s well-known book, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (1985, 2000), is consistent with the ‘primordialist school’, which employs biological explanations for the coalescing of primitive humans into kin groups as a survival strategy against competing human groupings. It is posited that the evolution of common physical



features and behavioural traits within kin groups assisted members of such groups to discern between fellow kin and potential enemies (see also Shils 1957 and Van den Berghe 1981 as well as the contributors to the volume edited by Barth 1969). Hence, advocates of the ‘primordial ethnicity thesis’ (also known as ‘evolutionary theory’ in the context of ethnic conflict) identify genetics as the core or essential reason for the outbreak of civil war and violent conflict fought along ethnic cleavages. Horowitz goes so far as to contend that the existence of ethnic cleavages is the most dominant factor that strains societal bonds, and that this factor possesses greater explanative ability than social, economic, political, and historical factors.

The ‘constructivist perspective’ views identity formation – including ethnic identity – as a process that is fluid and ongoing rather than static. Advocates of the constructivist perspective – referred to as ‘constructivists’ (or, less frequently as ‘instrumentalists’ or ‘circumstantialists’) – argue that identities can not only be multiple, but also overlapping with shared notions of culture and kinship. This perspective, which is influenced by the oft-cited work of Benedict Anderson (1991), views differences in identity (including ethnic identity) as being based on *perceived* boundaries between and among ethnic groups. The constructivist perspective contends that forces external to ethnic groups, such as state policies or elite manipulation, can play a significant role in shaping ethnic identities or group consciousness – even in cases where little-to-no identity formation existed before. Hence, the constructivist perspective places primacy on a perception (or idea) of common ethnic identity, while any discussion of biological foundations for ethnicity is rejected.

Henry E. Hale (2004) addresses the ethnic identity debate between primordialists and constructivists and attempts to move it forward by arguing that such dichotomous categories are rather hollow because they obfuscate micro-level explanations of human behaviour in relation to identity formation. Hale promotes a more psychological approach to ethnicity and identity formation while still drawing upon the insights of political scientists, sociologists and anthropologists. Hale’s synthesis of this multi-disciplinary (though psychology-heavy) approach is particularly compelling in the case of identity formation dynamics under duress or uncertainty. According to Hale, psychological experiments on small groups reveal:

“that the self-esteem produced in such experiments tends to depend on levels of uncertainty. People, this and other research suggests, derive self-esteem from their ability to successfully impose some modicum of cognitive order (meaningful social categories) on an uncertain social world. To posit that identity can be usefully seen as a self-locating device in an uncertain world is thus to be in tune with contemporary research stressing both the fundamental importance of identity and the driving psychological forces of human behavior” (2004: 466).

When the usual order of things in a particular society begins to change rapidly – such as the dissolution of the institutions of government during a civil war in the case of Somalia – individuals are driven to behave in such a way that certainty about the near-future is increased. Furthermore, when the state security apparatus in the form of the police, judiciary and armed forces disappear, civilians are often left with nothing in the way of personal safety and protection – aside from the perception of solidarity among their most immediate identity group. In the case of Somalia, this has been based on clan identity.

### 4.3 Clan Identity and Islamic Identity in Somalia

Given that Somalia is considered to be relatively homogeneous in ethnic terms (which is uncommon in comparison to other African states), it follows that the most pertinent identity grouping during a crisis and subsequent extended period of insecurity is that of clan identity. Ioan M. Lewis reinforces this assertion: “The widespread insecurity and lack of food resources associated with the collapse of Siyad’s [Barre’s] rule in 1991 prompted what is probably the most vicious upsurge of clan loyalties *in the history of the Somali people*” (emphasis added) (1994: 175, note 52). Clan identity shares many of the same traits as ethnic identity – a crucial point that will be elaborated upon in the following paragraph. Although ethnic identity (and clan identity in the case of Somalia) may serve as a safe haven in times of crisis, one should be mindful that such identities did not appear over-night. Rather, such identities existed in the past and usually crystallized over several centuries. It is also important to keep in mind that ethnic and clan identities are usually quite resilient during times of societal crisis, which helps explain their attractiveness in times of need.

Following the outbreak of civil war in Somalia in 1991, the most immediate way for individuals to make sense of the rapidly changing environment and impose a personal cognitive order was to latch on to clan identities and the respective clan groupings. Somalia is often characterised as being relatively homogeneous in terms of ethnic composition (Ssereo 2003: 25). Similarly, Somalia is considered to be primarily monolingual (with some important exceptions, noted below). Thus, it is facile to understand why clan identity re-emerged – after more than two decades of government suppression – as the most salient identity group for Somalis following the collapse of the Barre government in 1991 and subsequent violence. Florence Ssereo goes so far as to argue that “Somalia is an example in Africa where the social category ‘ethnic’ has been replaced by the ‘clan’” (Ibid.: 39).

The Somali language was officially converted to a common Latin script in 1972, and the new alphabetic writing system was disseminated as part of the Barre government’s mass literacy campaign in Somalia’s rural areas in the mid-1970s. Establishing a common language and alphabet was also part of the government’s effort to diminish clan differences and promote a common, pan-national Somali culture and identity. Given the geographical size of Somalia, it is no surprise that the ‘Standard Somali’ is divided among three dialects that are found according to region: the north-central region is the ‘Northern’ dialect (and is most closely associated with ‘Standard Somali’); the coastal regions (including the national capital and largest city, Mogadishu) are home to the *Benaadir* dialect; and the southern region is the *Maay* dialect. Notably, the Maay dialect is so distinctive that other Somali speakers have difficulty understanding it, leading some scholars to classify the dialect as its own language (see, for example, Diriye Abdullahi 2000). The Maay dialect / language is spoken by two of the six Somali clan-families, the Rahanwiin and Digil.

Ahmed I. Samatar (2000) provides a persuasive essay that not only cautions against stereotyping ethnic conflict in Somalia but also depicts clan identity in a concise fashion. Samatar begins his essay by chastising the international community for its apathetic attitude towards Somalia during the mid-to-late 1990s, which is based, in his view, on the stereotyping of Africa more generally as a ‘dark continent’ of unending bloodletting and internal turmoil. He also identifies Somalia as a leading example of how certain states declined and eventually failed following the end of the Cold War owing to the massive reduction in military assistance and other forms of foreign aid following the end of American-Soviet competition.

Somalia may be identified as yet another case wherein government leaders focused on cultivating support among elites rather than providing good governance and public goods after attaining independence from its former colonial masters. Despite official government policy that prohibited favouritism based on clan lineage, Barre sought to attain the support of clan elites during his time in power. Although the Somali army was supposed to be a unified pan-Somali force, it was actually beset by rival clan divisions among the Marrehaan (also spelled Marehan), Ogaadeen (also spelled Ogaden), and the Dulbahante.<sup>9</sup> General Daoud Abdulleh, a leading proponent transforming the armed forces into a pan-Somali institution, was one of twenty-eight officers executed for treason in the late-1970s (Ssereo 2003: 31). Barre also lashed out at the Majeerteen clan, ordering the army and police to beat and kill its members for sharing a common clan identity with some of the officers implicated in the failed *coup d'état* in 1978 (Elmi 2010: 17-20). Despite the failure of the *coup d'état*, Barre felt that his grip on power was waning. Thus, as quietly as possible, he sought to solidify his political allegiance to the Marrehaan clan – which was Barre's patrilineal line. The Ogaadeen and Dulbahante clans, from which Barre's mother and brother-in-law<sup>10</sup> traced their respective lineages, were also courted. Important or prestigious government posts were allocated to individuals from these three clans (Ssereo 2003: 34). As the decade of the 1980s wore on, it became increasingly apparent to the other Somali clans and the wider population that the official policy of clan equality was little more than a facade. This led to the creation and spread of a popular saying in Somalia in the 1980s: "The Marrehaan are drunk on power; the Dulbahante are drunk on pride; the Ogaadeen are drunk on powdered milk" (quoted in Lewis 1994: 165). Appeals to pan-Somali nationalism were ignored, as the political favouritism given to select clans further eroded any modicum of legitimacy that the Barre regime held at the beginning of the 1990s.

Although it cannot be disputed that Somalia was the epitome of a failed state from 1991 to 2006, it remains beset by fragile governance institutions, hostile neighbours and sporadic clan infighting (Bakonyi 2009; Besteman 1999; El Bushra 2004; Gettleman 2009; Hashim 1997b; Hussein 1992; Le Sage 2002; Luling 1997; Lyons 1995; Murunga 2005; Ohanwe 2009; Rutherford 2008). Samatar is quick to caution against classifying inter-clan violence as being based on primordial notions of ethnicity. Yet, his most compelling insights relate to the dangers of over-simplifying Somali society such that it becomes synonymous with clanism. Samatar (2000: 38-39) avers correctly that Somali studies have been dominated by the claim that all facets of Somali society revolve around clan identities – even if these clan affiliations are constructed. In economic terms, clan identity is rooted in pastoral structures relating to cattle, camel, goat and sheep herding, which, by function, lends itself to nomadism. Although Somalis have conducted some small-scale agricultural production in recent decades – such as sorghum and *qat* cultivation in the western regions of the country – daily life is still moderately transient.<sup>11</sup> According to Lewis, the pastoralist-cultivator distinction is inconsequential, for "different individuals and segments of the same clan and lineage engage in both, and many of those who cultivate in local settlements also leave livestock in the care of nomadic kin" (1994: 19). The perpetual movement

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<sup>9</sup> Although the Dulbahante and Ogaadeen clans belong to the same clan-family, the Daarood, this does not prevent the clans from competing against one another. In Somalia, intra-clan rivalry within clan-families is acceptable.

<sup>10</sup> Barre's brother-in-law, Ahmed Suleiman Abdalla, held the powerful position of head of the National Security Service (NSS), a government entity that served as a form of secret police.

<sup>11</sup> From the 1960s until the outbreak of hostilities in 1991, bananas served as a leading agricultural export for Somalia. During the Barre regime, the production, export and marketing of bananas occurred under tight government control. In recent years, efforts to resume banana exports have been hampered by the threat of Somali pirates operating in the coastal regions of Somalia.

of nomadism means that geographical affiliation plays very little role in identity formation. Moreover, the lack of defined geographical boundaries emphasises the importance of kin or extended family, which lends itself to the somewhat larger linkages to particular clans based on groups of extended family lines (Lewis 1955, 2004, 2008).

Regardless of its status as constructed, patrilineal descent (*tol*) is the overarching means of tracing extended family lines through blood-ties and kinship. In northern Somalia (increasingly referred to as Somaliland in academic circles and popular accounts despite the aspiring state's lack of international recognition), Lewis counts nine clans, ranging in size from 20,000 to 130,000 people, based on common patrilineages (1994: 19). Lewis makes an additional classification by grouping clans into larger clan-families and situates these groups in various parts of Somalia: Dir (north-west); Isaaq (north-central); Daarood (north-east); Hawiye (south-central); Rahanwiin (south); and Digil (south). Although he does not dispute the classification of Somali clans into clan-families, Samatar is extremely critical of scholars who attempt to enumerate the demographic landscape of Somali society. For example, Samatar singles out Allen G. Sens for a stinging rebuke in response to an attempt to provide a statistical analysis of the clan-families. According to Sens (1997), "The Darod [Daarood] make up 35 per cent of the population, the Hawiye 23 per cent, the Isaaq 23 per cent, the Dighil [Digil] and Rahaawyn [Rahanwiin] 11 per cent, and the Dir 7 per cent" (cited in Samatar 2000: 65, note 6). Samatar contends that accurate demographic statistics for the entire country are unavailable and that accurate census data does not exist. Moreover, Samatar is concerned that the dissemination of such demographics will misinform government policy and possibly contribute to further hostilities.

Still mindful of the dangers of over-simplifying clanism and the challenges of enumerating various clan-families, Samatar concedes that the centrality of clan affiliations for Somali society has reached the status of being "axiomatic ... [and] so aboriginal a claim on the very ontology of Somalis, that, in the end, little else matters" (2000: 40). Although he does not deny the relevance of the above clan structures, Samatar reminds us that by placing too much emphasis on the role of clan identity in Somalia, it becomes facile for observers and commentators to deem any flare-up of violence as examples of 'tribalism' and 'tribal warfare'. In a similar vein, placing such primacy on clan identity connotes that Somalis prefer small 'pseudo-states' based on clan affiliation rather than transnationalist movements and the establishment of a full-functioning state with attendant institutions and practices aimed at the common good of all Somalis. Such misrepresentations of Somali society have significant implications for post-conflict reconstruction strategies and policies.

In a similar vein, one must be careful to not simplify or misrepresent Islamic identity in Somalia. Traditional order in Somali society – or *Umma* – is based on the twin pillars of kinship and clan identities, and Islamic precepts (for a helpful flow-chart that depicts the parallel set of linkages that comprise traditional Somali society, see Samatar 2000: 50). Islam began to gain traction in what is now Somalia in the tenth century. Islam arrived via increased contact with Muslim merchants and traders, which also served to steadily incorporate Somalia – both economically and culturally – within the wider region. Samatar notes that the arrival of Islam had several benefits, ranging from deeper spirituality to pan-Islamic linkages with other cultures to more transparent governance in terms of community affairs (2000: 51).

Islamic identity underwent a modest transformation under the colonial regimes of the British, French and Italians and once again during the post-colonial Barre regime. Under the various colonial administrations, Islam was separated from community governance structures and

considered a private pursuit. Islamic identity remained strong despite being sidelined by a succession of colonial administrations. Marriages continued to incorporate Muslim customs and ceremonies, including the reading of verses from the Koran. One year after the October 1969 *coup d'état* that brought General Mahammad Siyad Barre to power, 'Scientific Socialism' was proclaimed as the guiding organising principle for the Somali economy and political arena. Given the prominence of Islam in Somali society, this particular brand of 'Scientific Socialism' was merged in an overt and pragmatic fashion with religious tenets. Thus, concepts such as 'wealth-sharing' and 'self-reliance', which share much in common in both Islam and socialism, were incorporated into the speeches, announcements and slogans of Barre and other government officials.

An oft-heard Somali government slogan of the 1970s was 'Tribalism divides; Socialism unites' (see Lewis 1994: 150-151 and 172, note 11). Concomitantly, tribalism was rigorously discouraged and acts of tribal nepotism were deemed by the government to be criminal behaviour. Officially, allusions to tribalism and attempts to use clan lineage for personal gain were outlawed. Traditional practices such as the collective payment of 'blood-money' or 'blood-compensation' by clan members to aggrieved parties were also prohibited by the new Somali government. Yet, as described earlier in this paper, Barre and his closest supporters still employed clan and lineage ties for political gain. This was not unobserved by the wider Somali public. However, fear of government reprisal meant that such knowledge was not openly discussed or acted upon.

Islamic identity and clan identity are considered the twin pillars of Somali society. This duality is fluid with much overlap, as evidenced by the immersion of Islamic customs and laws in the everyday life of the Somali clans. In the post-Barre era, however, Islamic identity has exhibited greater rigidity in some quarters, prompting a degree of divergence from clan identity. For some Islamic movements within Somalia, politics and policies should be devoid of references to clan identity (Elmi 2010: 4). This divergence became particularly evident during the peak of the Union of Islamic Courts / Islamic Courts Union's (UIC / ICU) control of Mogadishu and environs when it brought a brief, six-month interval of stability to much of the southern part of the country in mid-to-late 2006. In assessing the prospects for identity reconstruction as a long-term strategy to ending Somalia's simmering civil war, Afyare Abdi Elmi (2010) concludes that a Somali nationalist identity that transcends clan and Islamic identities has much in the way of potential. That said, Elmi is careful to point out that at present, "Islamic identity has the better chance ... of functioning as an inclusive identity in identity reconstruction" (Ibid.: 47). This is based on the view that some Islamists believe that a broader Somali identity is already fused with many Islamic tenets – so much so that Somali identity and Islamic identity may be used interchangeably (Ibid.: 46-47). This is not to say that some of the country's Islamists would prefer to see Somalia become a *shari'a*-based Islamic state – an outcome that neighbouring Kenya and Ethiopia, as well as the United States, would be loath to permit. It is also doubtful that Islamic militias, such as the al-Shabaab militants, would be interested in a more inclusive identity that would allow some degree of reconciliation of not only a wider Somali identity but also clan identity with their brand of Islamic identity. Reconciliation is vital if there is any hope for successful post-conflict reconstruction in Somalia (Ahmed & Green 1999; Hesse 2010b and 2010c; ICG 2002b, 2003a, 2004a, 2004b, 2006, 2007, 2008 and 2009; Kusow 2004; Menkhaus 1996, 2007 and 2009; Mohamoud 2006; Osman & Souaré Issaka 2007; Samatar 2010; Webersik 2004). The paper now turns to the issue of clan identity and Islamic identity among non-state armed groups.

## 4.4 Clan Identity and Islamic Identity among Somalia's Non-State Armed Groups

In recent years, Somalia has drawn much international attention and notoriety owing to the rise of non-state armed groups ranging from Islamist militias (such as al-Shabaab and Hizb al-Islam) to pirates operating along the Somali coast and throughout the Gulf of Aden. As regards the Islamist militias, the greatest fear of the United States and other Western nations is that such groups will provide safe havens for al-Qaeda operatives and perhaps participate in al-Qaeda-directed terrorist attacks in Somalia and the region (Bryden 2003; Dagne 2002; Elliot & Holzer 2009; Ibrahim 2010; ICG 2002a and 2005b; Le Sage 2001; Medani 2002; Menkhaus 2002; Shay 2005 and 2008). This fear is based on the attractiveness of Somalia for al-Qaeda: a virtual absence of state institutions including border, military, internal security and police enforcement; adjacency to the Persian Gulf and Middle East; and a populace that is primarily Sunni Muslim in religious affiliation. Somali piracy is more of an irritant than direct security threat to the United States, its allies, and neighbouring countries. That said, military resources have been diverted to combat the threat of piracy (though with ambiguous results), and the Gulf of Aden is part of the important trade conduit that is linked to the Red Sea and Suez Canal and its multi-billion-dollar annual shipments of goods and valuable commodities such as oil. Within Somalia itself, the economic spin-offs from the multi-million-dollar ransoms support countless individuals, households and commercial sectors in Mogadishu and coastal communities ranging from licit sectors such as construction and mobile telephones to illicit sectors such as weapons and narcotics.

The most notorious non-state armed group is *al-Shabaab* (roughly translated as 'the youth'), which is suspected of being affiliated with al-Qaeda. Al-Shabaab is known to adhere to a particularly rigid interpretation of *shari'a* law and seeks to establish a fundamentalist Islamic republic in Somalia. In addition to its focus on youth-aged recruits, al-Shabaab distinguishes itself from other major Islamist militias in the region by employing websites on the Internet to recruit new members from abroad – including the United States and Australia. These recruitment techniques are alleged to have attracted a Canadian, Mohamed Hersi, a twenty-five-year-old former University of Toronto student. Hersi was recently arrested in Toronto, at Pearson International Airport, and was charged with "planning to participate in terrorist activities [with al-Shabaab] and counselling another person to do the same" (Freeze & McArthur 2011).

Al-Shabaab's organisational hierarchy is relatively flat, and its cells have a great deal of autonomy. Sheik Hasssan Dahir Aweys is regarded as the leader of al-Shabaab, one of several powerful militants loosely associated under the purview of *al-Ittihaad al-Islamia* (AIAI) in Somalia. However, al-Shabaab later split from AIAI, as the former began to target pro-Western secular warlords and aid workers. In recent years, al-Shabaab has become the primary militia of the UIC / ICU and has led the armed struggle against Somalia's Transitional Federal Government (TFG). Although al-Shabaab has launched attacks throughout the country including the north, its strongholds are located in the southern part of Somalia (Stevenson 2010: 28-29; ICG 2011).

Although scholars such as Afyare Abdi Elmi have outlined the overlap of identities among clan, Islamic and Somali nationalist groupings, it is evident that Islamist militias tend to place primacy on Islam. It is difficult to provide a precise figure on the number of Islamist militants who espouse an Islamic identity that transcends clan and Somali nationalist attachments. Nonetheless, we can still employ a proxy in order to estimate the number of Islamist militants active in Somalia. According to Stevenson, this figure is somewhere between 5,000 to 10,000 individuals

(2010: 32). This group is not a homogeneous block, for there are divisions among the Islamist militias. Until mid-2009, al-Shabaab and Hizb al-Islam often coordinated their attacks on TFG and African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) positions in and around Mogadishu. However, the joint military offensive launched by al-Shabaab and Hizb al-Islam failed in May 2009 owing to a surprisingly effective set of defensive counter-measures by AMISOM troops. In-fighting over tactics and blame for the loss against AMISOM led to a split between al-Shabaab and Hizb al-Islam. In a subsequent round of fighting, al-Shabaab actually turned on Hizb al-Islam and ejected the latter from several towns and regions in southern Somalia. This action has not only marginalised Hizb al-Islam, but it has also created yet another rival for al-Shabaab (ICG 2010). Adding to al-Shabaab's difficulty is the rise of a pro-TFG armed group, *Ahlu Sunnah Wal Jama'a* (ASWJ), which is Islamist (Sufi) yet rejects al-Shabaab's strict fundamentalist tenets. Al-Shabaab's challenges seem to be mounting, as the Islamist militia group's:

“military troubles have been compounded by the steady erosion of its popularity and credibility. The attempt to forcefully homogenise Islam and zealously enforce a harsh interpretation of Sharia, as well as the general climate of fear and claustrophobia fostered by an authoritarian administrative style, has deeply alienated large segments of society, even in areas once regarded as solid insurgent territory. Adding to the public disquiet has been the movement's increasing radicalisation and the internal coup that has consolidated the influence of extremists allied to foreign jihadis” (ICG 2010: 1).

In sum, al-Shabaab's influence in Somalia appears to be ebbing, and its extreme behaviour seems to be repelling attempts to promote Islamic identity at the expense of clan and Somali nationalist identities throughout the country.

Shifting the focus of this section to the role of non-state armed groups in coastal regions, a preliminary observation is that the scholarly and policy-oriented literature on Somali piracy has rapidly increased in number over the past three years (see, for example, Anderson et al. 2009; De Wijk et al. 2010; Direk et al. 2010; Fink & Galvin 2009; Fu et al. 2010; Ho 2009; Kraska & Wilson 2009; Onuoha 2010; Palliser, 2010; Pham 2010a; Potgieter 2009 and 2010; Roach 2010; Sauvageot 2009; Spearin 2010; Totten & Bernal 2010; Treves 2009; Trumbull 2010; Van Ginkel & Van der Putten 2010; Weir 2009; Yakemtchouk 2009). Traditionally, Somalia's coastal communities have focused on fishing, with only sporadic intermingling with nomadic clans, such as during drought or famine. Nomadic clans tend to employ the term ‘fish-eater’ in the pejorative sense, and consume fish only when meat from pastoralism or vegetation from small-scale cultivation are not available during times of environmental crisis and food scarcity. Hence, some intermittent contact between nomadic clans and coastal communities has been witnessed in the past. The *Benaadir* dialect of the Somali language is spoken throughout the coastal regions of the country including Mogadishu.

Although some fishermen have converted their boats in order to engage in piracy, it would be inaccurate to state that all coastal communities have been converted to pirate strongholds.<sup>12</sup> As piracy has grown along the Somali coast over the past decade, so too has the influx of Somali clan members from various parts of the country. The lucrative, multi-million-dollar ransoms have

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<sup>12</sup> Eichstaedt (2010) provides a journalistic-style account of piracy in and around the Somali coast. Although the book provides colour photographs of pirates on water and land (in prison), it also contains unhelpful chapter titles such as “Cauldron of Chaos” which misleads the wider public and sustains stereotypes. Piracy is a rational response to changing forms of regional and local order.

compelled many clans, even those with long histories of acrimonious competition for power and influence, to vitiate past disputes and engage in cooperative behaviour as pirate groups. Thus, much intermingling of clans is now occurring in Somalia's coastal communities. For example, the pirates that seized the MV Faina, a Ukrainian ship carrying weapons and military equipment in 2008, were drawn from different (and long-term rival) clan-families, the Daarood and Hawiye (see VOA News 2008).

Although differing clan identities do not prevent cooperative behaviour within coastal communities supported by piracy, it is evident that the financial incentives are an intervening variable that is absent throughout the in-land regions of Somalia. Given the exposure to Islamic traders over the centuries, Islamist religious practices have probably been present in Somalia's coastal communities for longer than any other part of the country. However, the strength of Islamic identity in Somalia's coastal communities more generally and among pirates more specifically is no greater than the rest of the country. Even during the rise of Islamist militant groups and the brief period of UIC / ICU government over the past decade, the influence of Islam as a predominant identity in coastal communities and among pirates is negligible. That said, the potential for linkages between Islamist militant groups and pirates should not be ignored. According to Stevenson, "there are extant tactical relationships between pirates and Islamist militants" (2010: 31). Mindful of his subsequent caveat that "these links appear to be essentially mercenary rather than political or ideological" (Ibid.), a recently leaked diplomatic cable underscores the importance of such connections. In late 2008, Canadian Navy Captain Chris Dickinson (of the HMCS Ville de Quebec) told Canadian diplomats at the High Commission in London that "clear links between the pirates and established terrorist networks exist. In many cases there are the same people using the same routes. Most commercial maritime operators in the area are surprised that the international community does not do more to disrupt the linkages" (Freeze 2011). Later on, Canadian diplomats forwarded Dickinson's comments to American diplomats. This information then appeared on a US State Department cable that was subsequently leaked as part of a larger packet of diplomatic cables by Wikileaks in February 2011. Although Somali pirates are neither adopting militant Islamic identities, nor carrying out jihadist terrorist attacks, the potential for future synergies should be heeded by analysts of all stripes.

## **4.5 Summary / Conclusion**

The existence of identity cleavages – based on clan or religious differences – in a particular state or region is not, by itself, a sufficient catalyst for civil war or regional conflict. It is important to understand that identity formation is fluid and should be understood in relation to political struggles over power, influence and resources. In other words, the exacerbation of clan or religious differences is often part of a deliberate, calculated campaign undertaken by state actors and non-state actors with coherent social, political and economic interests and goals.

Obviously, the influence of clan identities and Islamic identity in Somalia is important. For Ssereo, the clan represents "the unit of political and social mobilisation and organisation" for Somalis and that clan identity "under normal circumstances, shared cultural values, traditions and customs as well as language are the basis for unity and social cohesion" (2003: 39). The purpose of this paper has been to incorporate texture and nuance to our understanding of the level of importance and influence of clan identity and Islamic identity on everyday life in Somalia. To this end, the paper has outlined the shortcomings of linking ethnic differences with biological or primordialist underpinnings as well as the danger of simply identifying the existence of ethnic heterogeneity and cleavages as the catalyst for violent conflict. These shortcomings and dangers



are readily applicable to clan differences and cleavages, and have therefore been situated in the context of recent violence in Somalia. It is important to note that describing weak states as 'chaotic' and beset by 'tribal conflict' or 'clan violence' obscures the true causes of civil conflict. Such descriptions also ignore the deliberate, rational actions of elites – including warlords and clan leaders – to incite violence in order to preserve their respective positions of dominance in the wider political economy of the country or region.

The legacy of economic mismanagement and an ill-conceived attempt to annex the Ogaden and Haud regions resulting in a costly war with Ethiopia in the late-1970s, combined with difficult drought conditions in the mid-to-late-1980s, served as a catalyst for civil strife in Somalia and eventual state collapse by 1991. This resulted in immeasurable suffering among the civilian population in the form of death and displacement. In the aftermath of the collapse of the Somali state, we witnessed a shifting of elite alliances and strategies to control economic resources (Saether 2000: 134-135). The rise of warlords, pirates and militias over the past two decades is not an extended episode of chaos but rather a reordering of Somali society on more overt clan lineages and Islamic identities. The concomitant rise of elites among such groups is another attempt to establish and support patronage lines and new political, economic and social power structures. In the absence of safety and security, civilian populations under psychological duress sought succour with others based on common clan and religious group identities.

## 5 Legitimacy among the Somali: The Importance of Clan and Islamic Identities in Insurgency, Counterinsurgency, and Any Eventual Solution

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### 5.1 Introduction

In the two decades since 27 January 1991 when the dictator Muhammad Siyad Barre ignominiously fled Mogadishu inside the last functioning tank in the country's once-proud military, leaving behind a capital in ruins and in the throes of uncontrolled street violence, Somalia has been the prime example of what Robert Rotberg has termed the "collapsed state," a "rare and extreme version of the failed state" that is "a mere geographical expression, a black hole into which a failed polity has fallen," where "there is dark energy, but the forces of entropy have overwhelmed the radiance that hitherto provided some semblance of order and other vital political goods to the inhabitants (no longer the citizens) embraced by language or ethnic affinities or borders" (Rotberg 2004: 9-10). It has stubbornly resisted no fewer than fourteen attempts to reconstitute a central government and the fifteenth such undertaking, the current internationally-backed<sup>13</sup> but chronically weak "Transitional Federal Government" (TFG), just barely manages to hold on to a few districts in the capital – and that much only thanks to the presence of the more than 8,000 Ugandan and Burundian troops that make up the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM).

In contrast, insurgents spearheaded by the *Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen* ("Movement of Warrior Youth," al-Shabaab), a militant Islamist movement which was declared a "specially designated global terrorist" by the United States State Department in 2008 (U.S., Department of State 2008), a "listed terrorist organization" by the Australian government the following year (Australia, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2009), and, in early 2010, a "proscribed

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<sup>13</sup> It is significant that while the TFG and its predecessor entities have received various expressions of support from the international community, other states have been rather reluctant to actually accord it formal recognition. While the United States, for example, never formally severed relations with Somalia after the collapse of the Somali state in 1991, neither has it officially recognized any of the fifteen transitional governments, including the current TFG. The State Department website merely states: "The United States maintains regular dialogue with the TFG and other key stakeholders in Somalia through the U.S. Embassy in Nairobi, Kenya." In fact, the lack of affirmative *de jure* recognition for the TFG is presumed by the introduction in October 2009 of a Congressional Resolution by the chairman of the Africa Subcommittee of the U.S. House of Representatives urging "the Obama Administration to recognize the TFG and allow the opening of an official Somali Embassy in Washington." The clear implication is that the United States Government accords the TFG something less than normal diplomatic recognition as a sovereign. In fact, this point was formally conceded in early 2010 by the Obama administration when, in a brief filed with the U.S. Supreme Court, the Solicitor-General of the United States and the Legal Advisor of the State Department acknowledged that "since the fall of that government, the United States has not recognized any entity as the government of Somalia." Similarly, the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office's website states: "Since the fall of the Siad Barre regime in 1991 there have been no formal diplomatic links between the UK and Somalia." See U.S. Supreme Court (2010a), *Samantar v. Yousuf* (2010); U.S. Supreme Court (2010b), *Samantar v. Yousuf* (2010).

organization” under the Terrorism Act by the British government (U.K., Home Office 2010), and a “listed terrorist group” by the Canadian government (Canada, Ministry of Public Safety 2010), effectively control wide swathes of Somali territory and operate more-or-less freely in areas where they do not exercise actual day-to-day governance – the exception being the Somaliland and Puntland regions, discussed below.

This study makes the argument that the failure of Somalia’s TFG and its predecessors to prevail over their opponents and bring an end to the conflict has little to do with the complaints often voiced of lack of outside assistance, especially of the military kind, than other factors over which external actors can have little positive effect. Specifically, if the regime fighting an insurgency is unable or unwilling to achieve internal political legitimacy, no outside intervention will be able to help it to “victory,” as even a cursory review of the relationship between legitimacy and military force in civil wars will confirm. In examining how such has been the case in Somalia, it will be necessary to also look at the nature of political legitimacy in Somali society, deriving pointers from the success not only of the Islamist insurgents of al-Shabaab and their allies, but also the relatively stable new polities which have emerged in various parts of the territory of the former Somali state in mobilizing clan loyalties and Islamic sensibilities. The conclusion draws out the implications of engaging these alternative centers of legitimacy, an approach the international community has come around to embracing, albeit somewhat slowly and hesitantly, amid the failure to otherwise check the progress of the insurgency and ensure a modicum of stability and security in the geopolitically sensitive Horn of Africa.

## 5.2 Legitimacy and Identity among the Somali

Somali identity is historically rooted in paternal descent (*tol*) meticulously memorialized in genealogies (*abtirsiinyo*, “reckoning of ancestors”), which determines each individual’s exact place in society. At the apices of this structure are the “clan-families.” According to the most widely accepted division, the follow are the major clan-families among the Somali: Darod, Dir, Hawiye, Isaq, Digil and Rahanweyn. The first four, historically predominantly nomadic pastoralists, are reckoned “noble” (*bilis*) clans, while the Digil and Rahanweyn, also known collectively as “Digil Mirifle,” who were cultivators and agro-pastoralists, occupy a second tier in Somali society. The latter also speak a dialect of Somali, *af-maymay*, which is distinct from the *af-maxaa* of the former. A third tier also exists in the Somali social hierarchy, consisting of minority clans whose members, known collectively as *Sab*, historically carried out occupations such as metalworking and tanning which, in the eyes of the nomadic “noble clans,” rendered them ritually unclean (see Lewis 1961). This social hierarchy likewise has implications for political life. It is noteworthy, for example, that Muhammad Siyad Barre’s vice-president and defense minister (and sometime prime minister), Mohamed Ali Samantar, was a Sab of metalworking background (*Tumal*). The choice of this particular officer – who, thanks to a potentially far-reaching unanimous decision last year by the Supreme Court of the United States in *Samantar v. Yousuf* (2010) (U.S. Supreme Court 2010c), is currently the defendant in a human rights case brought on behalf of victims of the regime – for preferment undoubtedly had more than something to do with the fact that his origins make it highly unlikely that he could ever lead a coup against his benefactor.

These genealogical groupings being traditionally too large and too widely dispersed to act as politically cohesive units – although, in modern times, the advent of instantaneous mass communications has resulted in rendering the segmentary solidarity of their members a significant factor in national politics – the clan-families are subdividing into clans and sub-clans

by descent in the male line from an eponymous ancestor at the head of each clan lineage. Within the clan, the most clearly defined subsidiary group is an individual's "primary lineage," which also represents the limits of exogamy, and within which an individual's primary identification is with what has been described as the "*diya*-paying group" (from the Arabic *diya*, "blood-wealth"). This most basic and stable unit of Somali social organization consists of kinsmen with collective responsibility for one another with respect to exogenous actors. The unity of the group is founded not only on shared ancestry, traced to a common ancestor four to eight generations back, but also a formal political contract (*heer*) between its members. If a member of a *diya*-paying group kills or injures someone outside the group, the members of his group are jointly responsible for that action and will collectively see to making reparation. Conversely, if one of its members is injured or killed, the *diya*-paying group will either collectively seek vengeance or share in whatever compensation may be forthcoming. Of course, the nature of the clan system is itself very nuanced and, while rooted in blood relationships, is also historically a consequence of nomadic pastoral life with its need to defend scarce resources, that results, over time, to an openness to the formation of new alliances and, even later, in new identities (see Brons 2001: 99-113). British anthropologist I.M. Lewis, arguably the foremost living authority on Somali history and culture, has observed that "the vital importance of this grouping, in an environment in which the pressure of population on sparse environmental resources is acute, and where fighting over access to water and pasture is common, can hardly be overemphasized" since it is "upon his *diya*-paying group, and potentially on wider circles of clansmen within his clan-family, that the individual ultimately depends for the security of his person and property" (Lewis 2010: 8-9).

The pervasiveness of the clan system distinguished Somalia from the vast majority of post-independence African states where the principal problem was the formation of a viable transcendent nationalism capable of uniting widely divergent ethnic groups who found themselves grouped together in 'states' created by colonialism. The Somali were different. They consisted of a single ethnic group with only one major internal division – the divide which separated the members of the four "noble clans" and the Digil Mirifle – and "considered themselves bound together by a common language, by an essentially nomadic pastoral culture, and by the shared profession of Islam" (Idem 2004: 492). Nationalism was already part of their experience insofar as concerns national culture since they "spoke the same language, shared the same predominantly nomadic herding culture, and were all adherents of Sunni Islam with a strong attachment to the Sufi brotherhood"; all they lacked was political unity at the level of the culturally-defined nation (Idem 1994: 221). Thus, Somalis formed an ethnic group or nation, but not, traditionally, a single polity. Despite fifty years of state-building, urbanization, civil war, state collapse and emigration, the bonds of kinship remain the most durable feature of Somali social, political and economic life. While ethnicity is a category that has applicability vis-à-vis non-Somalis which a Somali may encounter, within Somali society it is clan that is the focus of identity, notwithstanding the fact that the latter, unlike the former, does not exhibit readily-apparent formal "markers," relying instead on genealogical criteria which, until fairly recently, was orally transmitted.

Modern Somalia itself, which historically had never been a unified political entity, was born out of a union between the British Protectorate of Somaliland, which became independent as the State of Somaliland on 26 June 1960, and the territory then administered by Italy as a United Nations trust and which had, before the Second World War, been an Italian colony. The latter received its independence on 1 July 1960, and the two states, under the influence of the African nationalism fashionable during the period, entered into a union, even though, common language and religion notwithstanding, they had never developed a common sense of nationhood and had very different

colonial experiences. Consequently, by the time the army commander, Siyad Barre, seized power in October 1969, “it had become increasingly clear that Somali parliamentary democracy had become a travesty, an elaborate, rarefied game with little relevance to the daily challenges facing the population” (Lyons & Samatar 1995: 14).

A year after taking over, Siyad Barre proclaimed the “Somali Democratic Republic,” an officially Marxist state, and tried to stamp out clan identity as an anachronistic barrier to progress that ought to be replaced by nationalism and “Scientific Socialism.” The non-kinship term *jaalle* (“friend” or “comrade”) was introduced to replace the traditional term of polite address *ina’adeer* (“cousin”). Traditional clan elders had their positions abolished or, at the very least, subsumed into the bureaucratic structure of the state. At the height of the campaign, it became a criminal offense to even refer to one’s own or another’s clan identity (see Laitin 1976: 449-468). Given how deeply rooted the clan identity was, it was not surprising that *Jaalle* Siyad Barre failed in his efforts to efface the bonds. Ultimately, it was the regime itself which simply dissolved when, in January 1991, Siyad Barre – who had ironically evolved over time from a Soviet client into a U.S. ally after President Jimmy Carter broke with the Ethiopian regime of Mengistu Haile Mariam over the latter’s increasingly repressive human rights record (see Woodward 2006: 22-27) – was caught between popular rebellions led the Isaq and Darod in the north and a Hawiye uprising in central Somalia and was chased out of Mogadishu altogether. By the time of the dictator’s flight:

“Somalia had fallen apart into the traditional clan and lineage divisions which, in the absence of other forms of law and order, alone offered some degree of security. The general situation now vividly recalled the descriptions of Burton and other nineteenth century European explorers: a land of clan (and clan segment) republics where the would-be traveler needed to secure the protection of each group whose territory he sought to traverse” (Lewis 2002: 263).

While, shortly after seizing power, Siyad Barre adopted “Scientific Socialism” with the professed goal of uniting the nation by eliminating its ancient clan-based division, in order to maintain power, the dictator soon fell back to calling on kinship ties – another example of their continuing relevance. With the exception of his previously-mentioned defense chief, Siyad Barre’s most trusted ministers came from his own Darod clan-family: the Marehan clan of his paternal relations, the Dhulbahante clan of his son-in-law Ahmed Suleiman Abdulle, who headed the notorious National Security Service, and the Ogaden clan of his maternal kin. Siyad Barre’s “MOD” coalition first led him into the disastrous Ogaden War (1977-1978), a clumsy attempt to exploit the chaos of the Ethiopian Revolution to seize the eponymous territory. The resulting influx of over a million Ogadeni refugees created enormous problems for the Somali state (which became even more dependent upon humanitarian aid from its Western allies) which were only exacerbated when half of them were placed in refugee camps in the middle of the northern regions of Somaliland that was the traditional home of their Isaq rivals. This led to the Isaq forming the Somali National Movement (SNM). Another result of the failed war was an abortive coup attempt by disaffected officers from the Majeerteen clan, another Darod group, against the regime; those who escaped arrest went on to form the Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF) with the backing of their clansmen. Over the next decade the two new opposition groups, both born of a conflict that had its origins in Siyad Barre’s own complicated political management strategy, would light the fuses that would ultimately explode not just the dictatorship but the Somali state with it (see Lewis 1992: 35-52).

When, after the collapse of the Siyad Barre regime, the Hawiye leaders whose forces held sway over the abandoned capital, Muhammad Farah ‘Aideed and Ali Mahdi, fell out with one other, the fighting and cutting off of food supplies brought about a humanitarian crisis which provoked global outrage, leading to no fewer than three successive international military interventions to secure the flow of humanitarian assistance: the United Nations Operation in Somalia I (UNOSOM I, April-December 1992), the United States-led Unified Task Force (UNITAF, December 1992-May 1993), and United Nations Operation in Somalia II (UNOSOM II, March 1993-March 1995) (see Hirsh & Oakley 1995). Ultimately, however, central and southern Somalia returned to the age-old pattern of armed clan factions mobilized by powerful figures – referred to by Somalis with the traditional title formerly reserved for battle leaders, *abbaanduule*, and thus quickly dubbed “warlords” by foreign journalists – and sustained by the spoils of conflict vying with each other for control of territory and such economic assets as were to be found amid the ruins of the collapsed state, including bananas for export (see Luling 1997: 287-302).

Meanwhile, in the absence of effective political structures of any kind, Islamic authorities cropped up in response to problems of crime, *shari’a* being a common denominator around which different communities could organize. As the Islamic legal authorities gradually assumed policing as well as adjudicating functions, those authorities having greater (that is, external) resources acquired greater influence. It should be noted that the Somali traditionally subscribe to Sunni Islam and follow the *Shāfi’ī* school (*mahdab*) of jurisprudence which, although conservative, is open to a variety of liberal views regarding practice (Lewis 1994: 167). Throughout most of its historical times up to independence in 1960, while there were different movements within the Sunni Islam in Somalia, the most dominant among the populace were the Sufi brotherhoods (*tariqa*, plural *turuq*), especially that of the *Qadiriyya* order, although the *Ahmadiyya* order, introduced into Somali lands in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was also influential (see Lewis 1998b). While traditional Islamic schools and scholars (*ulamā*) played a role as focal points for rudimentary political opposition to colonial rule in Italian Somalia, historically their role in the politics of the Somali clan structure was neither institutionalized nor particularly prominent. In part this is because historically *shari’a* was not especially entrenched in Somalia: being largely pastoralists, the Somali relied more on customary law (*xeer*) than on religious prescriptions (see van Notten 2006). Hence, Somali Islamism is largely a post-colonial movement which became active in the late 1980s and, absent the collapse of the state and the ensuing civil strife (and, some would add, the renewed U.S. interest in terrorist linkages in the aftermath of the 11 September 2001 attacks), it is doubtful that militant Islamism would be much more than a marginal force in Somali politics (see Marchal 2004: 114-145).

Religion’s increased influence has been largely a phenomenon of small towns and urban centers, although increased adherence to its normative precepts is a wider phenomenon. The Islamists attempted to fill certain voids left by state collapse and otherwise unattended to by emergent forces like the warlords. In doing so, they also made a bid to supplant clan and other identities, offering a pan-Islamist identity in lieu of other allegiances. In the absence of anything resembling a functioning state and amid the multiplying divisions of a society returning to segmentary solidarity as the basis for organization, Islam came to be seen by some Somalis as an alternative to both the traditional clan-based identities and the newly emergent criminal syndicates led by so-called “warlords” (Abdullahi 2007: 196-221). Islamic religious leaders have helped organize security and other services, and businessmen in particular were supportive of the establishment of *shari’a*-based courts throughout the south in the 1990s, which offered a pan-Islamist identity as

an alternative to other possible legitimizing principles for political organisation among the Somali (see Shay 2007: 93-127; Menkhaus 2005: 23-47; Menkhaus 2007a: 5-20).

### **5.3 The Travails of the Transitional Federal Government**

Since the collapse of the Somali government and state in 1991, regional and international actors have tried repeatedly to find ways to reconstitute the Somali state by sponsoring lengthy “peace processes” aimed establishing a functioning government in Mogadishu. The current embattled Transitional Federal Government (TFG) is the result of the fourteenth and fifteenth such attempts, the “Nairobi” (or “Mbagathi”) and “Djibouti” processes.

The Nairobi Process began in October 2002 under the patronage of the subregional Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) with international support, especially from the European Union and the United States. The discussions were so protracted – one can hardly blame the more than 400 self-appointed delegates from southern Somalia for not being especially eager to hurry home – that it took them just over two years to establish the TFG using the “4.5 formula,” according to which power was to be shared between four of the clan-families – Darod, Dir, Hawiye, and Digil Mirifle (the Isaq, centered in Somaliland, declined to participate) – with some space (the “0.5”) for minority clans. The Transitional Federal Charter agreed to in October 2004 gave the Transitional Federal Institutions of government a five-year mandate. Heading up this structure was a Darod warlord, Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmad, who had launched his political career with the proceeds of a \$1 million ransom he had extracted from the Taiwanese after his militia seized the trawler *MV Shen Kno II* in 1997.

It was not until June 2005, and then only under heavy pressure from its long-suffering Kenyan hosts, that the TFG finally relocated to Somali territory. Even then, the putative government could not enter its capital – the prime minister, Mohamed Ali Ghedi, who, to his credit, at least made the attempt, narrowly escaped assassination for his trouble – and settled instead in Jowhar, a provincial town safely north of Mogadishu, under the protection of a local warlord who was a fellow Hawiye clansman and patron of the prime minister’s. When relations eventually soured with the warlord, the TFG was forced to move on and, in a turn of events that is particularly humiliating in the Somali cultural context, was forced to take shelter among the Rahanweyn in the backwater of Baidoa, some 250 kilometers southwest of the capital. So undesirable was the location and so reduced its circumstances that it was February 2006 before the TFG could muster a quorum to convene its parliament in a converted barn (see Lewis 2010: 188-194).

Meanwhile, a new force was emerging in Somalia, the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC), made up of the militias of the various local tribunals set up by the Islamists, which took control of Mogadishu in June 2006 after defeating a ragtag coalition of warlords and business leaders hastily thrown together by the United States (presumably acting through the Central Intelligence Agency) under the rather ironic banner of the “Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counter-Terrorism.” The American intervention achieved the exact opposite of what was intended in that the Islamists, far from being checked, actually prevailed and, for the first time since the fall of Siyad Barre, Mogadishu was united under a single administration. Moreover, the Islamists, who reorganized themselves into a governmental structure, the Council of Islamic Courts (CIC), quickly extended their control over much of southern and central Somalia, from the southern border of Puntland in the north to the Kenyan frontier in the south, leaving the TFG barely clinging on in Baidoa under the protection of the Ethiopian military (see Menkhaus 2007a: 357-390).

The CIC was, in many respects, a mixed blessing for most Somalis. The Islamists cleared away the roadblocks that had been set up by rival militias over the years and reopened the port of Mogadishu. They organized some rudimentary services, including the first municipal garbage collection in nearly two decades. On the other hand, these improvements went hand-in-hand with the imposition of Islamic strictures which were largely alien to Somali experience including a ban on watching the 2006 FIFA World Cup (deemed “un-Islamic behavior”) (see Mwangi 2010: 88-94).

Given their own earlier experiences with Somali Islamism, especially *al-Itihaad al-Islamiya* (“Islamic Union”), a group established in the early 1980s which sought the creation of an expansive “Islamic Republic of Greater Somalia” and eventually a political union embracing all Muslims in the Horn of Africa (see Tadesse 2002: 16-24), it was not surprising that, after many of the same extremists emerged in positions of authority in the CIC, neighboring Ethiopia would be alarmed by the rapid rise of the Islamists in Somalia. When a CIC attack on the TFG in Baidoa, which was being protected by Ethiopian units, provided the *casus belli*, Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi launched a full-scale military intervention on Christmas Eve 2006. The heavily-armed and well-trained Ethiopians quickly routed the CIC’s forces, many of whose commanders made the mistake of deploying in open country where their units were slaughtered by the invaders. “On the coat-tails of the Ethiopian forces rode the TFG” (Menkhaus 2007a: 382), which assumed, under heavy Ethiopian protection, control over key government buildings in Mogadishu.

As the populace’s sullen acquiescence to the new regime turned into resentment of what amounted to a *de facto* foreign occupation, an insurgency gathered steam. Seeming impervious to his increasingly tenuous position, Abdullahi Yusuf was finally forced to resign as president of the TFG in late 2008, his intransigence being increasingly viewed by Somalia’s neighbors as an obstacle to the latest peace process they had launched earlier that year by reaching out to the regime’s supposedly “moderate” opponents, led by the former Islamic Courts leader Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed. Sharif Ahmed was himself installed as the new TFG president in January 2009 by an electoral assembly packed for that purpose, which convened in Djibouti under the sponsorship of the Nairobi-based UN Political Office for Somalia. The mandate of the new regime was extended until August 2011 (see Menkhaus 2009c: 6-12; Pham 2009b: 84-90).

Not surprisingly, given how it came into being, the new iteration of the TFG has basically been “unable to expand its authority beyond Villa Somalia in Mogadishu, seat of the presidency” and “has had little relevance” (Kasaija 2010: 278). In the summer of 2009, when the insurgents attempted to encircle the TFG in Mogadishu, a number of analysts were surprised by the effectiveness of the Islamist push through territory controlled by Sharif Ahmed’s own Harti sub-clan of the Abgaal clan – the reluctance of even his closest kinsmen to defend him was a most telling indicator of his near-total lack of legitimacy. The promising alliance in early 2010 between the regime and the new Sufi movement *Ahlu Sunna wal-Jama’a* (“[Followers of] the Traditions and Consensus [of the Prophet Muhammad],” ASWJ), whose militias have opposed the Islamist insurgents in the central regions of Somalia, collapsed when Sharif Ahmed reneged on the terms of the power-sharing agreement. In fact, the incumbent TFG president seems as unwilling as his predecessor to engage in the sort of deal-making that would co-opt key stakeholders, extending his regime’s political base, and possibly prepare the ground for security operations that might break the continual stalemate (see Le Sage 2010). A March 2010 report by the United Nations Monitoring Group on Somalia was, for a diplomatic document, unusually candid in its assessment



of the regime and was, for all intents and purposes, a scathing indictment not only of the TFG, but of any policy built on it:

“The military stalemate is less a reflection of opposition strength than of the weakness of the Transitional Federal Government. Despite infusions of foreign training and assistance, government security forces remain ineffective, disorganized and corrupt – a composite of independent militias loyal to senior government officials and military officers who profit from the business of war and resist their integration under a single command. During the course of the mandate, government forces mounted only one notable offensive and immediately fell back from all the positions they managed to seize. The government owes its survival to the small African Union peace support operation, AMISOM, rather than to its own troops” (UN, Security Council 2010: 4).

The security sector as a whole lacks structure, organization and a functional chain of command – a problem that an international assessment of the security sector attributes to “lack of political commitment by leaders within the Transitional Federal Government or because of poor common command and control procedures”... To date, the Transitional Federal Government has never managed to deploy regimental or brigade-sized units on the battlefield.

The consequences of these deficiencies include an inability of the security forces of the Transitional Federal Government to take and hold ground, and very poor public perceptions of their performance by the Somali public. As a result, they have made few durable military gains during the course of the mandate, and the front line has remained, in at least one location, only 500 meters from the presidency” (Ibid.: 12).

In short, not only has the TFG “failed to generate a visible constituency of clan or business supporters in Mogadishu,” its very survival “now depends wholly on the presence of AMISOM forces” (Bruton 2010: 10) since, out of the some 9,000 troops which the three separate military missions – the United States, the European Union, and France – have trained and armed for the regime, no more than 1,000 remain (see Dickinson 2010). Efforts to supply this miniscule force have also proven counterproductive. Despite receiving more than eighty tons of weapons and ammunition from the United States in May 2009, the TFG singularly failed to expand its territory in Mogadishu. In fact, about the only noticeable change caused by the arms transfer was a collapse of prices in the arms market operating within walking distance of the government compound, suggesting that a not insignificant part of the shipment was simply sold by corrupt regime officials (see Pham 2009a; the price of AK-47 rounds, for example, fell over 50 percent to approximately \$0.30 each).

## **5.4 The Islamist Insurgents**

While the Ethiopian intervention in 2006 ended the rule of the Islamic Courts, the latter’s al-Shabaab militia not only survived, but emerged as the dominant force opposing the TFG and its international supporters. Al-Shabaab itself was born earlier under the leadership of one of the CIC’s more hard-line leaders, Sheikh Hassan Dahir ‘Aweys, who wanted for the Islamist movement a military wing whose members were not only well-trained but indoctrinated to a pan-

Islamist identity that transcended clan allegiances. The initiative was entrusted to one of his young deputies, Adan Hashi Farah “Ayro,” who had travelled to and been trained in Afghanistan before the al-Qaeda attacks on the United States and the subsequent American-led invasion in 2001. Other prominent leaders of the group had also had experience in Afghanistan and/or Kashmir, including Muktar Robow Ali (“Abu Mansur”), Ibrahim Haji Jama (“al-Afghani”) and Ahmed Abdi Godane (“Abu Zubair”), who eventually succeeded Ayro as the group’s nominal leader after the latter was killed in a U.S. airstrike in May 2008 (see Marchal 2009: 381-404).

After the Ethiopian invasion destroyed the CIC, al-Shabaab began operating as an independent entity. Over time, the group – insofar as its various operational units and factions can be said to share commonalities – has shifted its emphases from a purely local focus on driving out the foreign forces to an increasingly international agenda that has witnessed both a twin bombing in Kampala, Uganda, in July 2010 as well as formal proclamations of its adhesion to al-Qaeda. Gradually gaining control over much of southern and central Somalia – in January 2009, it even achieved an objective that eluded its former parent organisation, the CIC, when it took control of Baidoa – it has established local governments in those areas which administer its harsh version of *shari’a* as well as adjudicating more prosaic disputes. Since early 2009, al-Shabaab forces have not only attacked the TFG, but also battled with AMISOM forces, drawing the peacekeepers deeper into the conflict and causing them to suffer increasing casualties with terrorist attacks like the suicide bombing of 17 September 2009, which killed seventeen peacekeepers, including the deputy force commander, Brigadier General Juvenal Niyoyunguruza of Burundi, and wounded more than forty others (see CNN 2009), as well as more conventional offensives.

Al-Shabaab has also enjoyed some success reaching out to the Somali diaspora in North America, Europe and Australia. One young recruit, Shirwa Ahmed, perpetrated what was the first known suicide attack by an American citizen when, in October 2008, he drove a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) in Puntland. Others in the diaspora have been indicted by U.S. prosecutors for sending funding to the insurgency (see Perez 2010). Al-Shabaab has also provided training camps for foreign Islamist militants as well as safe haven for some higher-ranking al-Qaeda operatives in East Africa, including Abu Taha al-Sudani and Saleh Ali Saleh Nabhan, who were subsequently killed by Ethiopian and U.S. special operations forces, respectively (Stevenson 2010: 27-38).

Generally allied with al-Shabaab – although occasionally also competing with it for control of key towns and strategic resources like the port of Kismayo – is *Hizbul Islam* (“Islamic Party”), formed by ‘Aweys and other exiled former CIC hard-liners after the “moderates” acceded to the Djibouti Process with the TFG in 2008. The group’s primary difference with al-Shabaab is that it does not place as much emphasis on global jihadist objectives; rather its two principal demands are the implementation of a strict version of *shari’a* as the law in Somalia and withdrawal of all foreign troops from the country. Although it lost control of the strategic central town of Beledweyne to al-Shabaab forces in June 2010, Hizbul Islam still controls some territory in the southern and central Somali regions of Bay and Lower Shabelle. There have been reports of talks, allegedly mediated by foreign militants, between the two Islamist groups aimed at bringing about their merger (AFP 2010). Subsequently, during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, the two groups cooperated on a joint offensive against TFG and AMISOM forces in Mogadishu.

Another insurgent group is the *Mu’askar Ras Kamboni* (“Ras Kamboni Brigades”) led by Hassan Abdullah Hersi (“al-Turki”), a former military commander for the Islamic Courts. Based in Middle and Lower Jubba Valley, where it gained control of several strategically located towns

which control access to the Kenyan border, including Jilib Afmadoow and Dhooble, the Ras Kamboni Brigades were aligned with Hizbul Islam until the beginning of 2010, when it announced it was joining forces with al-Shabaab and the two groups proclaimed their adhesion to “the international jihad of al-Qaeda” (Abdi Sheikh & Abdi Guled 2010).

The insurgents’ attacks have increased in both ambition and sophistication. For example, whereas the 17 September 2009 suicide bombing of AMISOM headquarters and the 3 December 2009 assault which killed three TFG ministers as well as sixteen other people attending a graduation ceremony at Mogadishu’s Shamu Hotel both relied solely on explosives to inflict damage, the 24 August 2010 attack on the Muna Hotel, a location just blocks from Villa Somalia and frequented by TFG officials, involved al-Shabaab fighters dressed in government uniforms who went through the building room by room killing their victims. They then fought arriving security forces for some time before finally detonating their suicide vests. Other attacks have brought the critical facilities like the international airport, the road connecting the port to the rest of the capital, and the barracks housing the African peacekeeping force under increasing pressure. The often heavy-handed response of the AU force has caused it to be widely viewed as a party to the conflict rather than a neutral peacekeeping mission – thus bolstering the insurgents’ standing as “nationalists” among a populace that is traditionally disposed to xenophobia. Overall, the escalating insurgency underscores the difficulties faced by the TFG and its AMISOM protectors in securing even limited territory within Mogadishu and casts grave doubt on both the former’s viability and the latter’s mission.

Even when the insurgents suffer setbacks, they seem to be more adept at learning from them. In the aftermath of the losses it sustained in its 2010 Ramadan offensive, al-Shabaab reshuffled its leadership with Ibrahim Haji emerging as nominal leader of the group. More significantly, al-Shabaab has apparently formally adopted a decentralized system whereby various leaders have assumed command in their home areas, where they are most likely to garner support from fellow clansmen: the erstwhile emir, Ahmed Abdi Godane assumed control of operations in Somaliland; Fuad Mohamed Qalaf “Shongole” is in charge in Puntland; Mukhtar Robow Ali in the Bay and Bakool regions of southern Somalia; Hassan Abdullah Hersi “al-Turki” continues to hold sway over the Middle and Lower Jubba Valley with his Ras Kamboni Brigade now more integrated into the al-Shabaab organization; and Ali Mohamed Raghe “Dheere,” assisted by the Comoros-born al-Qaeda operative Fazul Abdullah Mohammed, leads the fight in Mogadishu. In this respect, the insurgents essentially combine and exploit the advantages of both clan ties and Islamic identities.

## **5.5 “Bottom-Up” versus “Top-Down”**

The most damning aspect of the utter failure of fourteen different attempts (so far) to rebuild the national-level institutions of the state in Somalia and the current struggles of the fifteenth just to survive the daily assaults of the Islamist insurgency is that there are ready examples elsewhere in the territory of the former Somali state of what is possible when a “bottom-up” or “building-block” strategy is adopted instead of continually defaulting to a “top-down” approach in the pursuit of a conflict resolution, peace-building, or, for that matter, counterinsurgency agenda. The experience illustrates how a process that is viewed as legitimate and supported by the populace can also address the international community’s interests about issues ranging from humanitarian concerns to maritime piracy to transnational terrorism (see Pham 2010b: 71-84).

Although they differ significantly in their political development and the courses they have charted for themselves to date, the northern Somali regions of Somaliland and Puntland have both been relatively successful in avoiding not only embroilment in the violence that has consumed most of southern and central Somalia, but also major internal conflict.

After the collapse of the Somali state, elders representing the various clans in the former British Somaliland Protectorate of Somaliland met in the ravaged city of Burao and agreed to a resolution that annulled the northern territory's merger with the former Italian colony and declared that it would revert to the sovereign status it had enjoyed upon the achievement of independence from Great Britain. Unlike other parts of Somalia, conflict in the region was averted when the Somali National Movement (SNM), the principal opposition group that had led the resistance against the Siyad Barre dictatorship in the region, and Isaq clan leaders purposely reached out to representatives of other clans in Somaliland, including the Darod/Harti (Dhulbahante and Warsangeli sub-clans) and Dir (Gadabuursi and Ise sub-clans). The chairman of the SNM, Abdirahman Ahmed Ali "Tuur," was appointed by consensus to be interim president of Somaliland for a period of two years by the Burao conference. In 1993, the Somaliland clans sent representatives to Borama for a national *guurti*, or council of elders, which elected Mohamed Haji Ibrahim Egal, who had briefly been prime minister of independent Somaliland in 1960 as well as democratically-elected prime minister of Somalia between 1967 and the military coup in 1969, as president of Somaliland. Interestingly, while the apportionment of seats at the two conferences was done along clan lines in a rough attempt to reflect the demographics of the territory, the actual decision making was by consensus (see Bradbury 2008: 77-136).

Egal's tenure saw, among other things, the drafting of a permanent constitution, approved by 97 percent of the voters in a May 2001 referendum, which provided for an executive branch of government consisting of a directly elected president and vice president and appointed ministers; a bicameral legislature consisting of an elected House of Representatives and an upper chamber of elders, the *guurti*; and an independent judiciary. After Egal's unexpected death in 2002, his vice president, Dahir Riyale Kahin, succeeded to the presidency. Kahin, in turn, was elected in his own right in a closely fought election in April 2003 – the margin of victory for the incumbent was just 80 votes out of nearly half a million cast and, amazingly, the dispute was settled peaceably through the courts. Multiparty elections for the House of Representatives were held in September 2005 which gave the president's party just 33 of the 82 seats, with the balance split between two other parties.

Although the report of a 2005 African Union fact-finding mission led by then African Union (AU) Commission Deputy Chairperson Patrick Mazimhaka concluded that "the fact that the union between Somaliland and Somalia was never ratified and also malfunctioned when it went into action from 1960 to 1990, makes Somaliland's search for recognition historically unique and self-justified in African political history" and recommended that "the AU should find a special method of dealing with this outstanding case" (AU Commission 2005) no country has yet recognized Somaliland's independence. This apparent snub, while grating to Somalilanders, has not prevented them from building a vibrant polity with a strong civil society sector.

Left to their own devices, the Somalilanders found the demobilization of former fighters, the formation of national defense and security services, and the extraordinary resettlement of over one million refugees and internally displaced persons, fostered the internal consolidation of their renascent polity, while the establishment of independent newspapers, radio stations, and a host of local NGOs and other civic organizations reinforced the nation-building exercise. The stable

environment thus created facilitated substantial investments by both local and diaspora businessmen who have built, among other achievements, a telecommunications infrastructure that is more developed and varied than in any of Somaliland's neighbors (see Jhazbhay 2009).

In this context, one needs to single out the educational sector as not only a bridge between Somalilanders in the diaspora and their kinsmen at home, but also an important impetus for the reconstruction and development of the region. The showcase of this is Amoud University, the first institution of its kind in Somaliland, which opened its doors in Boroma in 1997. The school took its name from an eponymous high school that was the first institution of its kind under the British Protectorate and had been the alma mater for many distinguished Somalilanders. The university was founded as a modest joint effort by local citizens, who assumed responsibility for the initiative, and their relations abroad, especially in the Middle East, who raised money for it and sent textbooks and other supplies. The institution opened with just two academic departments, education and business administration – the former because of the dire need for teachers in the country, the latter because of the opportunities for employment in the private sector as well as the possibility of graduates starting their own businesses. Even a noted Somali critic of Somaliland's quest for independence has praised Amoud for having “underscored the preciousness of investing in collective projects that strengthen common values and deepen peace” and “giving the population confidence that local resources can be mobilized to address development needs” (Samatar 2001: 654). Subsequently, universities have been established in Hargeisa (2000), Burco (2004) and Berbera (2009), although the latter institution has its origins in an older College of Fisheries and Maritime Management.

Unfortunately, Somaliland's political progress stalled for a period in recent years due to the repeated postponement of presidential and legislative elections beginning in 2008. From this author's firsthand observation, it would appear that while the crisis is “home-grown,” outside actors, especially the European Commission (EC) and the non-governmental organization Interpeace, exacerbated the situation, however unintentionally. First, the nomination of the National Election Commission (NEC) by the president and the opposition-controlled parliament took longer than expected. Then the government in Hargeisa, the EC, and Interpeace reached an agreement to undertake a new voter registration throughout Somaliland that would result in the issuance of a combination voter and national identification card – an admitted important symbolic goal for a nascent state. Complicating the exercise further, the NEC, with the agreement of Somaliland's political parties, decided that the card would carry, in addition to a photograph of the bearer, biometric data. The whole process only began in October 2008 and was soon thereafter interrupted by the suicide bombings carried out by al-Shabaab. When the process resumed, it was carried out with great enthusiasm and dispatch by both government and donors, so much so that fingerprint data was not collected from more than half of those registered and multiple registrations clearly took place in a number of localities. Eventually an internal compromise worked out in late September 2009 by all three of the region's political parties with encouragement from Ethiopia and the United Kingdom prorogued the term of the president and vice-president until one month after the holding of elections – whose date was not specified – thus preventing escalation of the crisis into violence, but still not holding elections. While the election problem is one rooted in Somaliland's internal politics, the outside actors did their local partners no favors by backing a process that was highly problematic from the onset and then, in the case of Interpeace, becoming embroiled as a party to the expanded conflict. Fortunately, good sense and some timely mediation by the traditional clan elders won the day and the internationally-monitored presidential election in June 2010 which resulted in the defeat of incumbent Dahir Riyale Kahin, the election of Ahmed Mohamed Mohamoud “Silanyo,” and a

smooth transition between the two – an unheard of occurrence in the region – reinforced Somaliland’s case for the international recognition that has thus far eluded it.

The Darod territories in the north-eastern promontory of Somalia have also demonstrated the success of the building-block model for the country and the wisdom of working with the deeply ingrained clan identities among the Somali. In 1998, tired of being held back by the constant violence and overall lack of social and political progress in central and southern Somalia, traditional clan elders of the Darod clan-family’s Harti clan – including its Dhulbahante, Majeerteen, and Warsangeli sub-groups – meeting in the town of Garowe opted to undertake a regional state formation process of their own in the northeast, establishing an autonomous administration for what they dubbed “Puntland State of Somalia.” After extensive consultations within the Darod/Harti clans and sub-clans, an interim charter was adopted which provided for a parliament whose members were chosen on a clan basis and who, in turn, elected a regional president, the first being Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed who, in 2004, went on to become president of the TFG (see Abraham 2002: 445-463).

Following the departure of the region’s first president for what was to be his disastrous tenure at the head of the TFG, Puntland legislators chose General Mohamud Muse Hersi (“Muse Adde”), as the new head of the regional administration. After serving one four-year term of office, Muse Adde lost a bid for re-election to Abdirahman Mohamed Mohamud “Farole,” who was elected in January 2009 from a field of over a dozen candidates. Unlike Somaliland, which has opted to reassert its independence, Puntland’s constitution simultaneously supports the notion of a federal Somalia and asserts the region’s right to negotiate the terms of union with any eventual national government.<sup>14</sup> In late 2009, in a sign that secessionism nonetheless is gaining some traction, the regional parliament voted unanimously to adopt a distinctive flag, coat of arms and anthem.

The region has, of course, become the center of Somali maritime piracy (see Pham 2010a: 325-341; Idem 2010: 31-64). The towns of Eyl and Garaad in Puntland, together with Hobyo and Xarardheere in central Somalia, have emerged as the principal pirate ports. Analysts believe that senior Puntland officials are abetting the piracy networks – the UN Sanctions Monitoring Group has charged that President Farole and members of his cabinet have received some of the proceeds of piracy (see UN Security Council 2010: 39) – and that the region is nudging in the direction of “becoming the pirate version of a narco-state” (Menkhaus 2009a: 24). This development should not be surprising given that, in 2008, for example, a year in which it is estimated that over \$100 million was paid in ransom to the pirates operating there, the entire budget for the Puntland State amounted to \$11.7 million (see Hesse 2010b: 79). Nevertheless, a recent report by the Council on Foreign Relations suggests the possibility of a “grand bargain” whereby Puntland reins in its piracy-inclined citizens in return for political and economic engagement by the international community:

“Development agencies should also seek to create a partnership with Puntland’s legitimate business community – probably the only social segment currently strong enough to challenge the pirate networks. The international community could focus on organizing the professional community in Puntland into a

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<sup>14</sup> While the region’s constitution still formally commits it to being a part of a future federal Somalia, the lack of progress in the southern and central parts of Somalia and the lackluster performance of the TFG have caused Puntlanders edge closer to outright secessionism. In late December 2009, the regional parliament voted unanimously to adopt a distinctive flag (hitherto the flag of Somalia had been used), coat of arms, and anthem.

professional association, providing capacity-building support and engaging the group in a discussion about what can be done to reduce piracy. A program that explicitly ties development incentives in the coastal zones to antipiracy efforts could effectively mobilize a population tiring of pirate promiscuity and excess” (Bruton 2010: 33-34.).

The problem, of course, is getting members of the international community to actually engage a non-state entity like Puntland and to do so in a consistent and sustainable manner. In 2002, for example, the Puntland Intelligence Service was established with American and Ethiopian assistance, but it has focused almost exclusively on counterterrorism while largely ignoring wider human security concerns. The regular police, on the other hand, on those occasions when they have been willing to confront pirates and other organized criminals, have more often than not found themselves outgunned (see Bryden & Brickhill 2010: 251-253).

The same challenges exist to an even greater extent for the other, less developed political entities emerging out of processes currently at work elsewhere among the Somali. In the central regions of Galguduud and Mudug, for example, the local residents set up several years ago what they have dubbed the “Galmudug State,” complete with its own website ([www.galmudug.com](http://www.galmudug.com)). Last year, they elected a veteran of the old Somali military, Colonel Mohamed Ahmed Alin, to a three-year term as the second president of what describes itself as “a secular, decentralized state.” There are similar stirrings among the Hawiye in the Benadir region around Mogadishu and among the Digil/Rahanweyn clans farther south.

By leveraging the legitimacy they enjoyed by virtue of deeply rooted kinship and geographic bonds – to say nothing of a very personal political consent – traditional leaders in Somaliland, Puntland and other Somali regions have managed to deliver to their constituents a relatively high degree of peace, security, economic progress, and the rule of law, despite the lack of international recognition (or much involvement for that matter). Put another way, they have combined Weber’s “traditional legitimacy” and “legal right” with service provision in order to establish a sustainable political arrangement, “an order beside the state” (see Dehéz & Gebrewold 2010: 1-20). As counterinsurgency theorist David Kilcullen has noted:

“Somalia is virtually a laboratory test case, with the south acting as a control group against the experiment in the north. We have the same ethnic groups, in some cases the same clans or even the same people, coming out of the same civil war and the same famine and humanitarian disaster, resulting from the collapse of the same state, yet you see completely different results arising from a bottom-up peace-building process based on local-level rule of law versus a top-down approach based on putting in place a “grand bargain” at the elite level” (Kilcullen 2010: 156).

Vital to the relatively successful efforts by Somaliland, Puntland and a few other areas to avoid both major internal conflict and embroilment in the violence affecting most of southern Somalia has been the role played by their clans. It was traditional clan elders who negotiated questions of political representation in key forums. In circumstances where elections were impossible, representatives were designated by clan units from among their members through a deliberative process in which all adult males had an opportunity to participate and where decisions were made on a consensual basis. The resulting social contract is – in stark contrast to the TFG process which emphasizes the individual actor – one between groups with deeply rooted legitimacy in kinship and geographic bonds.

Interestingly, another trait which the authorities in Somaliland and Puntland share with each other, but not with the TFG in Mogadishu, has been the fact that they have largely been self-supporting with respect to governmental finances. It has been argued that one of the most significant factors undermining state formation in Africa has been a limited revenue base, that is, a dependence on foreign aid and/or natural resource extraction for revenue. Throughout the world, the experience has been that taxation as a means of raising revenue not only provided income for the state, but facilitated a greater cohesion between the state and its stakeholders. In contrast, the virtual absence of taxation in post-colonial Africa has resulted in regimes that are largely decoupled from their societies (see Herbst 1990: 117-139). From this perspective, it is most telling that the most advanced state-building project among the Somalis has been in Somaliland, where the government collects taxes and license fees from business and real estate owners and imposes duties on the trade in *khat*, the mildly narcotic evergreen leaf chewed by many in the region, as well as imports and exports through the port of Berbera. Likewise, the second most successful endeavor is in Puntland, where the reliance on customs duties and an occasional fisheries license is perhaps more remote than direct taxes, but nonetheless requires that the government maintain certain minimum levels of efficiency (thus yet another reason why revenue flows from piracy, which has been centered in Puntland, is so pernicious). In contrast, the TFG and its predecessors relied exclusively on foreign aid.

Perhaps most importantly in the context of the rising tide of Islamist militancy in southern and central Somalia is the fact that, as one of the most astute observers of contemporary Somali society has observed, this reliance – especially in Somaliland but also in Puntland – on the older system of clan elders and the respect they command “has served as something of a mediating force in managing pragmatic interaction between custom and tradition, Islam and the secular realm of modern nationalism,” leading to a unique situation where “Islam may be pre-empting and/or containing Islamism” (Jhazbhay 1998: 198). The consequence of having an organic relationship between Somali culture and tradition and Islam appears to assure a stabilizing rather than disruptive role for religion in society in general and religion and politics in particular. In Somaliland, for example, while the population is almost exclusively Sunni Muslim and the *shahāda*, the Muslim profession of the oneness of God and the acceptance of Muhammad as God’s final prophet, is emblazoned on the flag, *shari’a* is only one source of the three sources of the jurisprudence in the region’s courts alongside secular legislation and Somali traditional law (*xeer*). On the other hand, given the limited resources of the Somaliland government, Quranic schools play an important role in basic education. Yet alongside these popular institutions stand equally well-received secular charities like Hargeisa’s Edna Adan Maternity Hospital, founded in 2002 by Edna Adan Ismail, the former foreign minister of Somaliland, which provides a higher standard of care than available anywhere else in the Somali lands for maternity and infant conditions as well as diagnosis and treatment for HIV/AIDS and sexually-transmitted diseases and general medical conditions. Thanks to this integrative approach, the northern clans have largely managed to “domesticate” the challenge of political Islam in a manner that their southern counterparts would do well to emulate.

Encouragingly, there have been indications that the international community may finally be coming to the same realization. U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Johnnie Carson has announced a “second-track strategy” that included greater engagement with government officials from Somaliland and Puntland with an eye to “looking for ways to strengthen their capacity both to govern and to deliver services to their people” (Carson 2010). Likewise, after long refusing to even acknowledge their existence, the African Union’s Peace and Security Council has directed AU Commission Chairperson Jean Ping to “broaden consultations



with Somaliland and Puntland as part of the overall efforts to promote stability and further peace and reconciliation in Somalia” (AU Peace and Security Council 2010: 3).

## 5.6 Conclusion

The now two-decades-old crisis in Somalia may have at its origin the collapse of a “failed state,” but blame for the prolongation of the ensuing misery would be more accurately attributed to a wholesale failure of imagination on the part of the international community as well as the actions of local actors beholden to it. First, they have been fixated almost exclusively on southern and central Somalia, continually repeating the mistakes of their successive “top-down” attempts at state-building, while obstinately refusing to even acknowledge the largely positive experiences in other parts of the country. Second, their approach has been almost entirely centered upon the state, while ignoring the traditional clan and religious leaders, members of the vibrant Somali business community, and civil society actors – the very people whose efforts have prevented statelessness from degenerating into complete anarchy and disorder. Third, when they do deign to intervene through proxies like the brave, but perhaps hapless, Ugandan and Burundian troops deployed in the beleaguered AMISOM peacekeeping force, instead of husbanding those scarce resources to contain the spread of the instability from Somalia and prevent additional foreign fighters and supplies from fueling the conflict in the country, they expend them in a vain effort to prop up an unpopular regime whose legitimacy in eyes of many Somalis is dubious at best and impose a peace where one does not exist.

In this regard, the comments of that remarkable scholar of the Somali, I.M. Lewis, are worth reporting:

“If further progress is to be achieved in state-formation, Somali politicians will surely have to come out of “denial” and start seriously exploring how clan and lineage ties can be utilized positively. Perhaps they could learn from their nomadic kinsmen who unashamedly celebrate these traditional institutions. Here a less Eurocentric and less evolutionary view of lineage institutions by Western commentators, social scientists, and bureaucrats might help to create a more productive environment for rethinking clanship (i.e. agnation) positively” (Lewis 2004: 508).

In contrast, the creation of the current version of the Transitional Federal Government at the beginning of 2009 was an exercise in political management which, while it made the requisite bows to Somali bonds of kinship, was more designed to impose a certain preconceived notion. Since an Islamist insurgency was perceived to be the chief challenge, a supposed “moderate” Islamist was installed at the head of the TFG through the extra-legal machinations of a group of *ersatz* parliamentarians designated for that purpose by the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General, doubling the size of the already-bloated legislature. The parliament also extended its own term by two years – although by what legal authority no one knows – and has since extended it by another three years. As for the president, it was simply assumed that because Sharif Ahmed was an Islamist, he would be able win over other Islamists. As it turns out, his backers failed to take into account the clan dynamics and soon learned that Sharif Ahmed had trouble rallying his own Abgaal kinsmen. By end of its first year in office, the current TFG controlled even less of Mogadishu than its unpopular predecessor did, despite the presence of an AMISOM force that was repeatedly reinforced. The regime’s few forces are regarded as just another armed faction – and quite justifiably so since they behave like one – while the TFG itself

has done little to establish its bona fides. The inescapable conclusion to be drawn from the evidence which a March 2010 report by the United Nations Monitoring Group on Somalia exhaustively documented is that about the only thing the members of the TFG do well – aside from losing battles – is to engage in criminal activity ranging from simple theft of resources to visa fraud. A more viable course than the one hitherto adopted by the international community will be the one that, by adapting to the decentralized nature of Somali social reality and privileging the “bottom-up” approach, is better suited to buy Somalis themselves the time and space within which to make their own determinations about their future political arrangements, while at the same time is flexible enough to allow their neighbors and the rest of the international community the ability to protect their legitimate security interests. Supporting governance at the level where it is accountable and legitimate – whether in the context of the nascent states like Somaliland and Puntland in the northern regions or in local communities and civil society structures in parts of the south – is the most effective and efficient means of both managing the societal fault-lines and countering the security threats that have arisen in the wake of the collapse of the Somali state.

The repeated failure of internationally-backed attempts at reestablishing a national government in Somalia and the diminishing legitimacy and increasingly untenable position of the current TFG in the face of the sustained insurgency led by al-Shabaab and its allies showed once again the profound error of privileging top-down, state-centric processes that are structurally engineered with a bias in favor of centralization, rather than bottom-up, community-based approaches adapted to the clan sensibilities of the Somali and viewed by them as legitimate. As one analyst has summarized it, “The UN, Western governments, and donors have tried repeatedly to build a strong central government – the kind of entity that they are most comfortable dealing with – in defiance of local sociopolitical dynamics and regional histories” (Kaplan 2010: 82). This despite the fact that the contemporary experience of insurgency and counterinsurgency in Iraq and Afghanistan – confirmed by the different outcomes in southern and central Somalia and in Somaliland and Puntland – clearly suggests that bottom-up efforts, especially when they reinforce the connection between legitimate local non-state structures to state institutions, have a greater chance of success. The fact is, as one scholar has noted, “At the dawn of the twenty-first century, the Somali clans do not appear at all to occupy a place all that fundamentally different from that which they had at the time of colonization” (Bader 1999: 227). The stubborn refusal to acknowledge this reality results in the repeated capture of otherwise well-intended efforts by the very spoiler elites – the type of individuals who are habitués of “peace processes” – whose lack of legitimacy, originating in their lack of connection to the deep roots of the society’s identities, provoked the crisis in the first place. The real shame is that this all-too-often repeated error has, in recent years alone, not only wasted billions of dollars, but also caused untold human suffering in some of the most vulnerable corners of the globe.

## 6 Red Team Document

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### 6.1 Introduction

What is the impact of clan and Islamic identity in Somalia? It is clear that knowledge about the nature of these identities is critical for understanding how Somalis organize their lives and in how they make important political decisions. The perspective of Somalis – their thoughts and actions as they are related to issues of clan and religious identity – captures elements of the complexity of this social environment. In this pursuit, this report combines a narrative approach, describing how most Somalis think about identity in the context of their actions through an analysis of a body of scholarly research (*mimetic red teaming*), with the author's personal experiences with Somali political actors and as a traveler inside Somalia (*diegetic red teaming*).<sup>15</sup>

The section that follows frames the basic choices in approaching the issue of identity in the Somali context. This section explores what I call the **enduring identity** approach and the **instrumental identity** approach. The next section evaluates these approaches with a mimetic view to scholarly research on the role of identity in Somalia's conflicts. This section presents several propositions for understanding how Somalis think about and act on identity that contribute to blue team strategic foresight. The final section addresses these approaches from the diegetic perspective of those engaged in Somalia on issues related to identity and conflict, and incorporates the author's field experience.

### 6.2 Framing the Issue

To many observers, Somalis appear to subscribe to an opaque and confusing welter of clan and religious identities. How outsiders understand the nature of Somalis' loyalties is central to shaping strategic choices. One approach holds that these identities are flexible and adaptable. Thus people can be encouraged to change how they act on these identities if they are provided with appropriate inducements. In this framework, Somalis think about clan and religious identity in instrumental ways. They subscribe to parochial versions of these identities partly as defensive reactions to events such as widespread insecurity and to people such as invading foreigners that alienate them as individuals. These Somalis are apt to join together to become "accidental guerrillas" (Kilcullen 2009) in the service of broader versions of these identities that, under other circumstances, would play very different roles in their lives. Thus the interpretation of identities as flexible instruments of politics also privileges the role of political entrepreneurs and ideologues, the people who understand how these identities work and who are in positions to manipulate them.

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<sup>15</sup> The author's interactions have been with members of the Somali National Movement and associated organizations, and with the Somali Salvation Democratic Front and associated organizations. The author also maintains contact with Ethiopian actors involved in that country's affairs in Somalia. Visits to Somalia commenced in 2006. This activity is undertaken as part of an academic research project to explain variations in the capacities of armed groups to manage divisive pressures and to pursue long-term political goals.

The instrumental approach holds that political entrepreneurs manipulate elders, religious leaders and others to gain authority in communities. Troublemakers convince individual Somalis that their alienation and a variety of other personal problems and desires can be assuaged if they join these troublemakers as comrades in the service of particular identities. Outsiders can counter these actions through building their own alliances with communities to win over the would-be accidental guerrillas. In this version, once troublemakers are banished and ostracized, the fighters will put down their weapons. Clan and religious identity will continue to play very important roles in these people's lives, only now in the service of the strategic aims of the outsiders (in partnership with local reformers) who have enough insight into how their identities operate such that these actors can shift the focus the behavior of individual Somalis. Thus both intervening forces – the troublemakers and their foreign (blue team) opponents – assume that identity is a product of individuals' and groups' **instrumental** calculations.

Somalia's recent history offers a test of this approach. The issue of identity in Somalia came to world attention in 1992 when the United Nations Mission in Somalia (UNOSOM I) was established to provide protection to humanitarian workers who brought aid to Somalis trapped by civil conflict and famine. The confusing and loose alliances between clans and sub-clans in the battle for power intensified the humanitarian emergency. Late in 1992 the UN welcomed the commitment of the United States to contribute about 25,000 soldiers to a 37,000-strong multilateral force called United Task Force (UNITAF). The United States force, Operation Restore Hope, was charged with carrying out a UN resolution to establish safe conditions for delivering humanitarian aid in the southern half of Somalia and to facilitate the transition to UNOSOM II, a UN operation to assist the Somali people in promoting security, rebuilding their economy and establishing a democratic state.

Though UNITAF facilitated the delivery of massive amounts of humanitarian aid, the politically most visible outcome was a continuation of conflict and even proliferation of clan and sub-clan-based armed groups. These who shot down American helicopters appeared to be other than accidental guerrillas: fighters committed to their local commanders and to their cause, and effective enough to prevail over the US military. For the wider public, Somali identity is captured in the film *Black Hawk Down*. This film shows fighters who believed in their causes and who could not be swayed with promises of humanitarian aid and foreign-supplied security. (Among the better post-mortems of this intervention from the interveners' perspectives is Clarke & Herbst 1997. Among the best Somali-based views of this event is Drysdale 1994; Drysdale (now Abbas Idiris) spent considerable time with Aideed during this time and also served as an advisor to several UN special representatives to Somalia.) The Canadian involvement in this intervention, approximately 1,400 troops in Operation Deliverance, led to serious domestic political scandal and the eventual disbanding of the Canadian Airborne Regiment. Soldiers who were sent to aid Somalis and instead engaged in gun battles with them might have reasonably concluded that the clan identities of those they fought were very deeply rooted indeed.

These experiences inform an alternative approach to the role of identity in Somali society and behavior. In its extreme form, this argument holds clan and religious identity to be **enduring**. These identities are reflections of a society that is insular and tends toward xenophobic reactions when it encounters significant numbers of foreigners. Somalis fight to be left alone to shepherd their flocks, engage in commerce and pursue their culture as they see fit, as they have since the days when the 19<sup>th</sup> century British explorer Sir Richard Burton chronicled his visit to their coast. Somalis want the resources and the technologies that the outside world offers. But their

commitment to work with foreigners to improve their situation is transient and is carried out on Somali terms.

Outsiders convinced of this enduring nature of identity may conclude that it is hard to help people who do not want to be helped. These outsiders complain that every agreement with Somalis founders on the shoals of shifting clan alliances. Negotiations are never-ending marathons, and tentative agreements always dissolve into a resumption of internecine fighting. In this formulation clan identity remains the basic unit of Somali politics and is at the root of Somalia's decades-long status as a cauldron of factional fighting. This perspective is suspicious of the value of dialogue and persuasion, and anticipates disappointment with engagement.

The blue team's choice of approach in deciding how to understand the role of identity in Somali society is decisive in shaping strategy. Should a blue team try to persuade local populations to change how they conduct politics or focus instead on the immediate goals of destroying an enemy or other narrowly defined goals? This is not necessarily a zero-sum choice, as one can develop friendly relations with local communities and groups of fighters at the same time as killing enemies. This choice is more consequential in deciding how force and material resources are applied; whether to provide supplies and protection to local and international NGOs, for example, or whether or not to offer models and expend resources to build local civil administration. The blue team understanding of the nature of identity also plays a significant part in the decision of whether or how to build relationships with elders, whether clan and Islamic identity can play a positive role in managing conflict, how to make choices with regard to media, and in critical situations, how to deploy members of a military whose core competence is the application of violence into a particular social context.

### **6.3 The Mimetic (Scholarly) Approach – Is Identity Instrumental or Enduring?**

Scholars who conduct research on the nature of identity in Somalia ultimately confront the prominence of clans in the discourse of academics and among Somalis themselves. Over the past several decades, the great majority of academic researchers accept the principle that this form of identity is a product of interactions that reflect ongoing power struggles and group interests. Thus what seems immutable is actually an “invented tradition,” a product of “a curious, but understandable, paradox: modern nations and all their impedimenta generally claim to be the opposite of constructed, namely human communities so ‘natural’ as to require no definition other than self-assertion” (Hobsbawm 1983: 13). In many African cases, this “invented tradition” draws from colonial-era ethnographies and popular images of societies that become internalized as integral features of particular societies. While not always the product of the conscious designs of actors who use ideological appeals in an instrumental fashion, these outcomes at least assume that identity is flexible and contingent.

In contrast to this notion of the flexibility and adaptability of identity, some scholarly research on the nature of identity in Somalia, particularly at the middle of the twentieth century, tended to stress the deep historical and cultural roots of social structures. In this view, clans and clan conflict are enduring components of Somali society and are indelibly linked to the region's warlike culture and its evolution in a harsh physical environment. In this argument, at least in some pristine ideal, clan conflict among pastoral peoples plays an important function in regulating social relations as they compete for scarce pasturage. Fighting in this egalitarian

“warrior culture” draws on lineage and the positive elements of an individual’s character to enable some adults to assume leadership roles in this difficult environment.

This view that clan identity reflects enduring cultural patterns is closely associated with Ioan Lewis, a former member of the British Somaliland Protectorate Administration and research assistant to Lord Hailey (the former Acting Viceroy of India) who was still writing about Somalia in 2010 (Gesheker 2001). In his foundational book, he noted that “the northern Somali are essentially a warlike people who readily engage in battle or raiding...Feud and war are instruments of power politics; they are the chief means by which the relations between groups are regulated” (Lewis 1961: 242). The role of state administration is to prevent battles and raiding, which puts any state administration, including ones that might be imagined in the future, in conflict with this culture’s core social values and practices. In his earlier work, Lewis argued that settlements of disputes was a worthy pursuit for the order and commerce that would follow in its wake, but that this increased tensions in societies as the “dissipating” elements of conflict (such as the settling of old scores and opportunities for one to change one’s status within groups) were suppressed.

In the idealized version, custom governs how violence is used and clan elders act as mediators. The core organizational element of this society is the *diya*-paying group. This group consists of people who are related through a lineage of four to eight generations and who pledge to support each other in collective enterprises. In North American terms, this represents the kind of kinship network that one might find at a very large family reunion that includes one’s second and third cousins, and that honors a prominent patriarch or matriarch as the shared progenitor. In the Somali setting, this kinship group supposedly bears collective responsibility for the behavior of its members and represents the ultimate indivisible social unit in conflict situations.

According to this view of Somali society, individuals’ commitments to the *diya* group is at the root of the tendency for larger groups to fragment when they engage in conflict, and ultimately, the failure of any one group to become large enough or powerful enough to prevail over the others. Within each of the six large clan families in Somalia (Dir, Issaq, Hawiye, Darood, Digal and Rahanwiin), one finds separate clans, and in each clan, several primary lineages, and in these lineages, multiple *diya* groups. Addressing the issue of conflict in pastoral societies in general, the colonial era anthropologist Evans-Pritchard noted that “there is always a contradiction in the definition of the political group, for a man is a member of it by virtue of his non-membership of the other groups of the same type” (Evans-Pritchard 1940: 281-82). In other words, the individual will fight on behalf of the larger group unless it contains a sub-group that his own group has pledged to oppose, a situation that injects parochial calculations and old disputes into the larger organizations and promotes continuous fragmentation. This social structure also presents opportunities to outsiders to manipulate alliances and rivalries and introduce divisive issues for their own purposes. Accordingly, many Somalis suspect that foreign sponsorship of peace agreements actually are efforts to ensure that Somalis never unify to the extent of creating their own central government that would cast out these external instigators.

Most contemporary scholars complain that this formulation of identity as enduring is unduly static and essentialist (this debate, vociferous at times, is reflected in exchanges between Besteman 1996: 12-33, Lewis 1998a: 100-08, and Besteman 1998: 109-20). Some link its appearance to the collaboration between ethnographers and colonial administrations to learn more about subject societies so that they could be more easily controlled. Scholars often view this approach as an artifact of a sort of colonial-era counterinsurgency in the service of a conservative

state-building project. Many scholars note the existence of cross-cutting practices such as inter-clan marriages that ameliorate this rigidity, and point to the diversity of local practices as evidence of a more flexible society than that depicted in media images of “clan warfare” (Besteman 1999).

Nonetheless, the enduring image of Somali society is real enough for many Somalis and to those who interact with them. Most Somali names reflect identification by patrilineal descent. For example, the head of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) in Mogadishu from 2004 to 2008 was Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed. Abdullahi is his first name, Yusuf is his father’s first name, and Ahmed is his grandfather’s first name. As happens in a multitude of other cases, this individual engaged in public life in ways that reinforce at least an image of the calculus of clan as an integral element of Somali life, regardless of the exceptions to this pattern that scholars and others may find (Mansur 1995b: 117-34). He was widely regarded as a politician of the Marjeerteen sub-clan of the Harti clan. This sub-clan affiliation was reinforced by his participation as a military officer in a failed 1978 coup attempt with other Marjeeteen officers. He then went into exile to form the Somali Salvation Democratic Front, one of the factions that battled for power from the late 1980s. This armed group has also been closely associated with the Marjeerteen sub-clan in the popular imagination.

In fact, external actors continually contribute to the “invention” of what they and Somalis actually believe to be ancient tradition. British colonial administrators in the Somaliland Protectorate, for example, designed colonial administration to reinforce the indigenous institutions of the local society as they understood these institutions, whether they existed as such or not. Thus heads of *diya* groups received official recognition (or more compliant ones were appointed) and practices such as collective punishment – the collective responsibility of members of the *diya* group – were codified to provide the legal framework for government reprisals against communities. British officials who thought that they were reinforcing an indigenous system of rule in fact were creating a new system, particularly as local notables began to play a role in state politics.

Scholars who stress the instrumental elements of identity focus on how changes in the social context of Somalis result in different ways that identity is mobilized as individuals and political groups pursue their interests. One example of this approach is found in the explanation of turmoil in the socially diverse Jubba River Valley region in Southern Somalia. Ken Menkhaus noted how the advent of commercial agriculture in this fertile region gave young men the prospect of access to the personal wealth that they needed to get married. This new-found capability of young men to decide who they wanted to marry undermined the control that elders exercised over matrimonial matches that, until then, were used as political instruments to solidify alliances between lineages (an element of *xeer*, an elder-mediated contract) and to settle disputes (Menkhaus 1989).

The practical impact of the development of commercial agriculture was that more young men were attracted to the agricultural region as this offered opportunities for these individuals to pursue their own fortunes. But it also injected into the region large numbers of young men who controlled their own earnings and who were free from the constraints of their elders, particularly as more laborers migrated from other parts of the country. Thus clan and sub-clan identities played a more important role in these young men’s lives as they left behind their *diya* groups, since these identities were malleable enough to absorb members who had no previous association with one another. Particularly after Somalia’s independence in 1960, connections with politicians and other state officials of one’s own clan or sub-clan determined one’s access to economic

opportunities. This created a sort of “neo-clan” in which “elders” were in fact politicians who used elements of lineage to build their patronage networks, in the process losing the role that marriage had played in constructing flexible, cross-cutting ties between local lineages (Iye 2000).

These “neo-clans” may not be “real” in the sense of fitting an enduring identity view of Somali society. Individual Somalis may include them in a clan-based calculus of politics in a way that makes these identities seem to be enduring. But the distinctive development of these “neo-clans” as a sort of parallel kinship-political patronage network may be of great import to blue team experts. They will find different organizational interests and logics, a different set of intermediaries within these organizations, and different relations with local communities, compared to stereotyped “traditional” types of clan organizations. Thus, while clan identities are critically important, it is advisable not to adopt a simple-minded perspective on this form of identity that assumes general comparability and predictability on the basis of an organizational chart of clan hierarchies.

Foreign aid to commercial agriculture in the 1970s and 1980s and foreign pressures in the early 1980s to privatize state-run enterprises reinforced this link between clan and political patronage, particularly in southern regions that were the focus of the country’s commercial agriculture (Roth 1987; Gunn 1987: 116-24). This resulted in a land grab in agricultural areas that rewarded politicians who were close to the regime. Continued foreign aid for agricultural projects and pressures to privatize state assets injected more resources into the president’s patronage networks and were used to reinforce the ties between the regime and local politicians. President Siyad Barre used clan affiliations as one of the criteria for distributing these resources to favored recipients. This represented an instrumental use of identity, par excellence, as the president’s purpose was to pit individuals and groups against one another. This created intense competition for presidential favor, even among those who otherwise might have hated him, as it was more important to most to get access to resources than to be isolated as a suspected enemy of the regime. This practice also meant that the general public assumed that clan affiliations drove officials’ actions. Thus the merging of the regime’s patronage politics with what foreign experts viewed as economic development and policy reform instead intensified rather than superseded social divisions (Hoban 1988: 208-16).

This instrumental view of clan identity helps to explain why southern river valleys became foci of violence after the collapse of Somalia’s central government in January 1991. For example, General Mohamed Farah Aideed, a former chief of intelligence for the Barre regime, used his position in the 1980s to settle disaffected *mooryaan* (urban youth) on river valley land. This provided the regime with a way to recruit young men into regime-aligned militias instead of leaving them exposed to others who might mobilize them against the regime. Aideed took advantage of his position to favor young men from his own Habr Gidir clan. When he broke with the regime in the late 1980s, many of these young men joined Aideed’s United Somali Congress to fight for their patron’s goal of becoming Somalia’s next president, and in the process terrorized local communities (Marchal 1993b: 295-320).

Other regime insiders used their positions to recruit young men from their own lineage networks, particularly from the late 1980s as the Barre regime became desperate to suppress uprisings and various Ethiopian-backed rebel groups along Somalia’s borders. Barre played the armed groups off one another, encouraging those with regime backing to loot the communities that he suspected of opposing his regime. Meanwhile he shifted his own favor among politicians to keep them from uniting against him and to cultivate competition amongst them for his support, much as he had



done in the years before the outbreak of serious conflict. These practices were at the root of this sort of neo-clan system in which key politicians occupied positions that were otherwise associated with elders, and political patronage and the access that this provided to economic opportunities competed with *xeer* and *diya* groups as mechanisms of social control (de Montclos 2001).

Instrumental views about identity formation stress the pursuit of self-interest as individuals make choices in the context of violence in ways that contribute to the solidarity of groups. In a violent situation, one may conclude that supporting the “home team” is the best way to acquire the collective benefit of protection. This can mean opting to openly affiliate with a “team”, even if one rejects the idea that politics should be organized around such parochial identities (Hardin 1995: 14-42). Clan identity remains important, even for the instrumentalist, as a form of insurance in the form of help to safeguard assets and to provide a refuge if one is forced to flee. One may go a step further and take part in violent action on a “team” basis even when one thinks that this kind of behavior is reprehensible. This happens because the existence of numerous factions gives even those who see clan politics as a form of “false consciousness” little confidence that others will refrain from violence against them on the basis of a purported clan identity. In such situations, it may make sense to be proactive and strike first rather than risk becoming the target of attack; a context can cause people to do things in the name of identity that they also recognize will make them and their society worse off in the long run (Fearon & Laitin 2003: 75-90).

Overall political context will define the nature of the “team”, even if the actual practice of politics is quite fluid. Clan and sub-clan were the dominant categories in Somalia’s violent patronage politics in the late 1980s and early 1990s, as politicians organized fighters. Likewise, those who fought to defend themselves against attacks from their violent government resorted to the same categories. For example, large-scale opposition mobilization occurred within the Issaq clan family in the form of the Somali National Movement, and in much smaller scales in the form of home guard and self-defense groups such as the Somali African Maki Organization and many others. This violent competition for security and resources provides opportunities for political entrepreneurs to treat lineage solidarities as a resource, a development that contrasts with the idea that Somalia suffers from a recurrence of “traditional” clan warfare (Compagnon 1998: 73-89). This analysis, though it recognizes clan identity as an integral element of Somali politics and society, differs from a simplistic view that clan identities are the basic unit of Somali politics because it focuses on the interactions that underlie these identities.

Political context is paramount in shaping how Somalis think about and mobilize identity, and implicitly, their capacities to make strategic calculations of interest. People’s continuous calculations on the basis of clan identities play a major role in shaping this context. While it is not easy to simply switch one’s clan identity (as this is partly based on what other people think about one’s identity), this approach assumes that changes in context can induce individuals to privilege other identities. In a parallel universe in which Somalia is run by vicious factions of enterprising investment bankers that curry favor among select groups of loyal customers, one might imagine the simultaneous emergence of tribes of lawyers and gangs of violent disgruntled merchant bankers and their clients. But it happened in the Somali case that clan and sub-clan identities played key roles in the pre-conflict distribution of political favors and the mobilization of armed young men. An individual’s attitude matters less than an individual’s behavior in this setting, particularly as the chart of clan affiliations enters into judgments about political actors and the formulation of one’s own choices.

## 6.4 Islamic Identity and Clan Politics – The Mimetic Approach

Given that nearly all Somalis are Muslim, can a shared Islamic identity supersede clan politics? Nearly all Somalis identify themselves as Muslim of the Sunni branch of the faith. Most practitioners of Islam subscribe to *Ash'ariyah* theology and the *Shafi'i* school of jurisprudence, which are tolerant of Sufi traditions such as pilgrimages to the tombs of revered teachers, and affiliations with two main brotherhoods (*tariqas*), *Qadiriyya* and *Ahmadiyya* (an elaboration of this school of jurisprudence is available at <http://www.shafiifiqh.com/>). A western researcher who was present in Mogadishu in the early 1990s noted that during periods of violence, “identification with Islam became a means to seek security: both in one’s identity and in the face of a ruthless society” (Marchal 2004: 114-45). This situation marked a significant shift from the period before 1991 in which religious activists played very little role in politics. Ethiopia’s invasion of Somalia in 2006 seemed to provide an issue around which diverse sectarian and clan identities could coalesce, a merging of a broader Somali national and religious identity against an occupying force, much as Catholic identity helped to provide cohesion to the Polish resistance to the Soviet presence during the Cold War.

Islamic identity has not prevailed over Somalia’s clan identities as a coordinating force in politics, despite the significant role of Islam in public life and popular dissatisfaction with the advent of clan-oriented conflict and the Ethiopian invasion. Islamists who are involved in politics often are divided amongst themselves over how to contend with clan politics and suffer from their own disputes over religious doctrine and political strategies. No particular politicized interpretation of Islam has succeeded in becoming a coordinating mechanism for mobilizing a critical mass of Somalis, even though a number of religious-oriented organizations have tried to do this.

The fractures in Somalia’s social terrain that have followed clan-oriented competition inhibit efforts of more radical organizers to recruit “accidental guerrillas” from among people who may reject clan politics and are alienated by the turmoil around them to reorder this political landscape. (A prominent argument in this vein is found in CTC 2007. This report includes translations of captured documents that detail the tribulations of radical organizers in Somalia during the early 1990s.) This view qualifies an analysis popular in policy making circles that Somalia’s lack of an effective central government, coupled with the availability of incomes from illicit markets, makes it an excellent location for foreign and local ideologues to organize extremist groups to impose their rule locally and to challenge western interests (Rabasa et al. 2007: 147-72). While it is true that those responsible for the bombings of the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania and the 2002 attacks on a hotel and an Israeli passenger aircraft in Mombasa had links to groups inside Somalia’s borders (ICG 2005b), these actors have encountered the same organizational problems limiting their reach that have beset other political groups in Somali society. This limitation also has been evident among much more moderate religious-inspired groups that do not threaten external interests.

The development of religious identities in the latter third of the twentieth century failed to challenge underlying social divisions. After independence in 1960, the Somali government permitted students to travel to Saudi Arabia and Persian Gulf states to attend universities, during which some were influenced by strict Salafist ideas that were not familiar to most people in Somali society. Commercial links with Saudi Arabia through the 1970s and 1980s also brought traders into contact with these religious ideas. Some of these traders valued the Salafist links to business partners for providing access to a new set of trust networks and a source of commercial law that cut across clan lines to enforce contracts. It is easy to paint this as evidence of radical

agendas rather than a shared outlook that facilitated personal piety and reputations for honesty in a commercial and personal setting (thus the need to be wary of extending the association of the two to claims of an extremist agenda, as in Tadesse 2002). Some commercial actors have shown interest in contributing resources to Islamist groups and these commercial-religious networks have been drawn into the efforts of various militia leaders to finance their operations. Whether these commercial operators become involved in these ways for commercial advantage, personal piety or political allegiance surely varies from individual to individual.

Salafist ideas began to play a more prominent role in Somali politics with the appearance of *al-Itihaad al-Islam* (AIAI), an armed militia that appeared in the early 1990s to build what they regarded as a true Islamic society. Some AIAI leaders were willing to make pronouncements that the clan-based “warlords” were *takfir*, i.e., not true Muslims, as they gathered recruits who had few other options because they were identified with clans that others targeted or they had no other way to defend themselves from the insecurity around them. AIAI also benefited from support from foreign charitable organizations based in other Muslim countries to provide services, particularly courts, and to rehabilitate infrastructure in areas that they controlled.

AIAI’s dilemma was that, as they grew larger, they became a target of attacks from clan-based militias once it became apparent that AIAI could offer an alternative basis for political and military mobilization. These attacks pushed the AIAI leadership to smaller ports where they could receive resources from foreign supporters with less interference from competing armed groups. Once AIAI began to acquire territorial bases, the group also began to be seen as “clannist” among those who examined the origins of its leadership that included many from smaller and weaker clans that were disadvantaged in the competition for power and security. This tendency combined with factional divisions within the group signaled that this Islamist organization could not override the underlying structure of political competition in Somalia. By 1997, the group had lost its territorial bases and its leadership had to become clandestine and more collective to avoid attack and accusations of clan bias. Nonetheless, AIAI saw some success in restoring order to some towns and gained a popular following as a result (Menkhaus 2004; LeSage 2001: 422-27).

At this point, how a blue team interprets the nature of the interplay of religious and clan identity will have dramatic implications for the selection of responses. If Islamist groups are able to draw followers across a wide social spectrum to the extent of rivaling clan militias and warlord politicians, attention turns to whether Islamist leaders should be enticed into cooperation with more moderate figures across the remainder of the political spectrum, or whether to try to exclude them. If one really fears that Somalia could become a secure haven for terrorist groups linked to radical Islamists, the nature of intervention to oppose radicalization will have to be considered. But if Islamist groups are prone to fragmentation if left alone, even radical activists among them will seem less appealing to potential foreign collaborators. Their foreign compatriots might regard local Islamists as constantly engaged in internecine battles and thus unreliable partners. Islamist control on the ground will be weaker than it appears if one looks only at the territorial dimension, since a “radical zone” might really contain a number of mutually opposed groups.

The fate of IAIA suggests that fragmentation of Islamist groups, despite the presence in Somalia of a distinct Islamic identity alongside clan identity, is likely the norm for other Islamist groups. The emergence in 2005-06 of the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) and then from 2006, of al-Shabaab, provides further evidence of tendencies toward fragmentation. The Ethiopian invasion of Somalia in 2006 and western backing for a weak Transitional Federal Government in Mogadishu and (to a much lesser extent) US strikes (or the perception of US strikes) against

individual Islamist figures provided some reinforcement of a distinct and more universal Islamic political identity. Many business leaders and clan politicians joined the Union of Islamic Courts against the foreign invader in 2006 and backed the new Supreme Council of Islamic Courts. A declaration of unity among Salifist groups in 2008 in *Jama'a al Wafaq al-Islamiyya* reinforced this impression of unity (Elmi 2010).

The reality since 2006 has been that as al-Shabaab has gained more territorial control in its battles against the TFG and its foreign backers, there has been a correspondingly greater tendency for more nationalist-oriented Islamist groups to unify in opposition. These latter groups include several clan-based organizations that are inspired by the successes of some of the Islamic courts groups in bringing a measure of stability to communities. The glue that holds these groups together under the umbrella of Hizbul Islam is their opposition to the military and political threat of their Islamist al-Shabaab rivals (Bruton 2010: 10-12), a development that shows how clan and Islamist identities can become entangled rather than mutually exclusive attachments.

Al-Shabaab organizers appear to be trapped in a context of clan politics. Their strategies for extending control over communities focuses on gaining the support of clan and sub-clan groups that have lost out in earlier political battles. This appears to present the possibility that some of these recruits could become the “accidental guerrillas” who buy into the broader ideological narratives of violent global jihad among the more radical leaders of al-Shabaab. But even in these instances, the “Islamist internationalists” have to contend with the parochial pull of local politics, as they contend with the divided loyalties of their fighters who also must attend to the obligations of kinship, a matter that is taken up in the next section. In any event, these centrifugal tendencies suggest that Islamist politics in Somalia is not all that distinct from clan-based politics, despite repeated announcements of the merger of Islamist groups and concern about Islamist threats in western media and policy circles.

A good illustration of the fragmented nature of Islamist identity and mobilization appeared in late 2009 as Islamist groups around the port of Kismayo fought against the foreign-backed TFG and African Union forces. Earlier in the year, al-Shabaab had produced a video professing allegiance to Osama bin Laden that featured Abu Mansour al-Amriki (Omar Hammami), an American citizen from Alabama who left to fight in Somalia until he was killed in March 2011 (Bin Laden [2009] produced his own call for Somali cooperation). Alongside this declaration were repeated statements from Hizbul Islam that it and al-Shabaab struggled in a common cause.

Upon closer examination, the declaration of allegiance to bin Laden appeared to have been a power play on the part of the Ras Kamboni Brigade segment of al-Shabaab to beat back an effort of Hizbul Islam's leader, Hassan Dahir Aweys, to assert personal control over al-Shabaab fighters. In fact, the two groups clashed on occasion and later the Ras Kamboni Brigade joined TFG forces in attacks on al-Shabaab, displaying the same fractious tendencies and shifting alliances as clan-based militias. This is due in part to the brigade's attachment to the town of Ras Kamboni and the local notables who supported this armed group and who had to make pragmatic calculations about how to preserve their autonomy to act amidst the shifting alliances around them.

This constant shifting and splitting of allegiances is not unique to Somalia. The conflict in Darfur, for example, has included dozens of rebel groups, most dividing and recombining on the basis of clan lines. While the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) was more successful at creating a coalition in fighting in southern Sudan from 1983, this author is able to identify about fifty groups that have operated at various times as distinct militias. These groups continue to assert distinct

identities, including one group that had been defined on paper as part of the SPLA even though in March 2011 it mutinied in a provincial capital and killed about a dozen people. This comparison highlights the difficulties that those with broad political programs and ideological frameworks face when trying to convince local leaders to shift their focus from parochial concerns. These regions also share with Somalia histories of intensive regime interference in the minutiae of local politics through the selective cultivation of kinship networks into patronage-based political systems and deft exploitation of opportunities to divide these groups against one another. A closer look at how individuals and groups in Somalia express and act on identities underscores these points and in particular points to the difficulties that political activists and ideologues of Islamist or any other type face in their efforts to shape conflict in that region.

## **6.5 A Diegetic Approach – The Situation from a Ground-Level View**

This section builds upon the author's experiences with Somalis in Somalia. The author has traveled there to talk with and observe commanders of armed groups to study the process of recruitment, discipline and indoctrination of fighters. These processes deal directly with issues of identity, as local commanders have to determine how to motivate and control their recruits in a context where clan affiliations and ideas about religion compete with other goals and agendas. Thus the section also draws upon the narratives of members of armed groups and political figures about their experiences over the past quarter century in various aspects of conflict in Somalia. Every settlement's experience is different and each commander confronts particular issues. There are, however, commonalities concerning clan and Islamic identity that emerge across these experiences that have become apparent to the author.

The strength of clan identity is directly related to the general Somali context of uncertainty about the future and attendant concerns among individuals and groups to maximize their capacities to provide for their security. Thus most Somalis have been hedging their bets for many years to survive. Most are willing to play most any side, which imparts an image of flexibility of identity on the part of individuals to academics and others who study their behavior. To other observers, this constant shifting of alliances seems like a barely organized chaos, demonstrating the unpredictability and contingency of Somali political behavior. But this is understandable to most Somalis as a predictable political practice. To Somalis, these commitments are genuine and are usually bound by contemporary understandings of *xeer* (or at least a shared sense of local community solidarity) and common basic understandings of Islamic propriety. This is consistent with the overriding aim of seeking security and preserving future options to adapt to an uncertain broader environment.

These concerns about security and experience in shifting factional alliances mean that most Somalis in positions of authority are exceptionally expert at reading other people as they judge whether other people's commitments are genuine and whether interlocutors are there only for themselves or for other narrow interests. They measure responses and actions on the basis of these assessments. They may present a series of tests of commitment that might not be detected as tests by non-Somalis. For some outsiders, this behavior makes Somalis seem like they have very limited or tentative buy-in to agreements, that they are unreliable and selfish. In fact, leaders, particularly local leaders who are directly responsible to kin and narrower communities, tend to be pragmatic in the extreme. These leaders need to act this way to better handle the changing conditions around them.

Elements of clan identity come into play in most transactions, at least in this author's experience. The constant examining and testing of non-Somalis is meant to detect whether the visitor is willing to treat Somali interlocutors as peers and is willing to work out plans with them. Other Somalis are tested to detect whether they are willing to abide by basic codes of conduct. Mutual recognition of honor is critical in these situations. This is relevant to clan identity because honor is based upon reputation within a particular community. The reputation of the host is based upon the safety of the guest. If the guest is threatened, a possible recourse is vendetta, a grave action for which tight clan identity is necessary to tap the kinship obligations needed to make a credible threat of vendetta. To work as a deterrent, the threat of vendetta rests upon the proposition that harm to one's kin, whether these kin are truly close relatives or not, is a threat to one's honor in a clan-based social context.

Elements of Islamic identity are understood to reinforce these relationships. Abu Hurayrah relates that Allah's Messenger said: "And whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day should show hospitality to his neighbor. And whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day should show hospitality to his guest" [Book 1, Hadith 75 (Sahih) Islam Today - <http://en.islamtoday.net/artshow-427-3256.htm>]. The guest, however, is advised that in the event of an attack on the host, the guest is bound to defend the host. Individuals are realistic that this is not always possible or advisable, but it is noted in a joking manner. No doubt joking also conveys the serious message that the bond of hospitality is reciprocal, and that the guest is bound by local rules.

For the guest, this insistence on local cultural practice can seem like Somalis' exhibition of cultural chauvinism in the extreme, combined with a deep suspicion of foreigners in general and their ideas. Deeper reflection reveals, however, that this behavior is consistent with the overriding pragmatism of people who have to figure out how to limit uncertainty in the absence of an effective central government. The bond of kinship and the threat of vendetta deter misbehavior by ambitious local actors. They know that their uses of violence or trickery would have negative consequences for kin. This is also what makes outsiders with ambitions so problematic and generates such suspicion of them, for the true outsider has no local kin or does not accept subordination to a host to guarantee the outsider's behavior. If this social mechanism to deter disruptive behavior does not apply to particular individuals, those people are seen in communities as particularly threatening. The local insistence on "connection" of one sort or another can give the visitor the ironic sense that, although Somalia lacks an effective central government, it is anything but an "ungoverned space." Social connections are dense and pervasive. There is very little room for anonymity and everyone seems to know everyone else's business.

These dense social connections make life very difficult for ideologues who attempt to mobilize local people around novel political ideas about Islam that lead beyond the provision of local courts and local protection. Ideas about political Islam that strike people as foreign are deeply threatening to the social support networks around them. Especially threatening are efforts of outsiders, the Jihad Internationalists who appear in the image of the old-fashioned Socialist Internationalists of an earlier day. Not only do these ideologues have to convince local people that their "accidental guerrilla" activities are really associated with foreigners' interests and goals; the ideologues have to convince their fighter recruits to violate local social practices in the pursuit of the holy struggle. This makes it very difficult for outsiders to find local recruits. Ultimately, the outsiders who have surfaced in Somalia's conflict and who are connected to more radical versions of Islamist agendas of one sort or another almost always have to subordinate themselves

to local Somali leaders if they are to survive for any length of time and themselves become the recruits of Somali actors.

This social dynamic is not unique to Somalia. Ingushetia, a part of Russia's Caucasian far south, managed to avoid being drawn into neighboring Chechnya's conflict in the 1990s, despite many shared circumstances and persistent efforts of outsiders and local activists to draw it into this struggle. Instead, Ingush voters elected the Afghan war hero, General Ruslan Aushev, to serve as their president. Aushev confronted a situation in which unemployed local youth were spending summers in radical training camps in the Middle East and returning as partisans of a rigid and strict interpretation of Islam that was alien to local practice. Foreign "guests" were also appearing and convincing these young men to join their violent jihad internationalist struggle, which was funded locally with ransoms from kidnappings and other crimes. Aushev's response was to legalize vendetta so that the victims of kidnappings could retaliate directly against the families of these youth. He also utilized a local clan-based patronage network to provide protection to and (hopefully) employ local youth and outsiders who were willing to accept local codes of behavior. This quickly isolated people who did not "fit" into these social relationships, which facilitated local security service efforts to deal with their unwanted "guests" from abroad (Derluguian 2001).

Returning to the Somali context, fighters who free themselves from the strictures of *xeer* and the obligations of *diya* groups are prone to behave in ways that put their kin at risk. Their own families and local notables have strong incentives to rein in the more radical militants out of concern for their own honor and standing. Foreign guests who try to recruit these militants are dangerously disruptive. In this author's observations, local *dawa* (mission) groups are tolerated, partly because they spend money and occasionally are extensions of overseas business ties. When they are connected to the latter, their behavior is more predictable and more easily controlled. But jihad internationalists – Pakistani students eager to spread radical visions, for example – either encounter the worst of what they must regard as grasping and conniving local behavior, or are simply quietly disposed of in the event that they become too threatening and refuse to abide by local custom. Once again, local leaders who are constantly hedging their bets and privileging pragmatic action create an exceptionally difficult social terrain for the would-be guerrilla leader who would rally others around the banner of broader agendas.

From the perspectives of outsiders with extensive agendas, Somalis are likely to seem like they are country bumpkins who are irredeemably set in their ways. To those who accept local custom, Somali hosts appear more like deeply loyal people who value honor and community above all else. Again, it is important to recognize these elements of identity as derivatives not simply of prior practice but also of the general insecurity and the pragmatic need to preserve options. Thus in this situational matrix, alongside ideas about clan and Islamic identity, a person who impinges the honor of a notable person has made that person seem weak in front of others. How many of the community's sons is he willing to put at risk to get his honor back? The answer is "all of them" because without honor he is powerless and exposed. This seemingly "deep tradition" plays a very practical functional role, venerated though it may be, and underlies the tendencies for local notables to be constantly engaged in actions to rein in provocative behavior of others around them. This also contributes to the tendency for outsiders with agendas to be like fish out of water, unable to hitch their agendas to the local social structure or to burrow into it to redirect it to serve their aims.

In this context, personal professions of Islamic identity often serve to reinforce local cultural traits. Individuals will often say that Somali society is inherently Islamic, and that this can be seen

in the concern for the welfare of guests, standard notions of propriety, and a reputation for honesty in business, much as a significant segment of the population in the United States identifies its country and communities as founded on Christian values. At the level of personal faith, hosts often question this visitor whether he is Muslim, for surely one who is interested in and positive about Somali society must hold Islam in high regard. While tolerance may be shown toward other faiths, it is important that there be faith. The absence of faith is usually regarded as a sign of immorality or weakness. (More traveled interlocutors often distinguish between Americans and Europeans in this regard, given their awareness of the Godless nature of many European societies!)

But on a personal level Islamic identity does not trump every other consideration. This author was able to conduct an informal sort of experiment in this regard during the 2006 World Cup. At least in towns such as Hargeisa, Borama and Berbera, there was side support for African teams such as Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire, while Tunisia was judged to be "not African enough". Ghana's defeat of the USA in Group E was seen as a proper blow against the arrogant Americans that could be shared by Somalis as fellow Africans. So at least in sport, team support drew on old post-colonial solidarities (so I was informed) and did not necessarily favor co-religionists. Some argue that soccer is an expression of a grassroots politics of class (the classic statement is Armstrong & Harris 1991: 422-58). But after the matches were decided, this author could observe in morning light the return to serious pursuits as described above.

## **6.6 Conclusion**

From this ground-level perspective, clan and Islamic identities are used instrumentally, yet are enduring in the sense that they supply the social relationships and the narratives in which these strategies are expressed. These frameworks predominate even among Somalis who recognize the role that the pre-conflict dictatorship and the years of insecurity and uncertainty have played in strengthening particularly clan identity. As a prominent businesswoman from Mogadishu wrote, Somalis are a people who "kidnapped themselves" as they acted out their political history, creating a system of clan conflict that is self-reinforcing. Yet alongside her clear recognition of the instrumental and contingent uses of this identity is her underlying expression of enduring elements of identity, that "Somalis, who are mainly pastoral, are a born-free race, divided into clans more or less great, rich and powerful" (Gassim 1994: 8). Recognizing the attractions of this system, she proposes that personal transformations of Islamic faith in a manner resembling the Christian born-again experience are necessary to reduce violence and moderate the negative effects of clan identification. Such suggestions draw on enduring notions of identity, but in explicitly instrumental fashion.

Other proposals for action blend instrumental action with awareness of the enduring natures of identities. For example, Alex de Waal warns of the futility of trying to change systems of conflict and social relations such as those in Somalia. His suggestion is to play to the existing patronage networks embedded in local politics and clan relations. The shifting constellation of alliances and factional splits can be harnessed to accomplish modest goals, much as NATO forces in Afghanistan from October 2001 used the Northern Alliance to undermine and topple the Taliban regime (de Waal 2010: 38-41). This is a well-known technique in the region, and is regularly practiced on the part of Ethiopian officials who are keen to prevent the consolidation of a strong Somali state that would be prone to pursue irredentist agendas among Ethiopia's ethnic Somali population. Likewise, the recognition among Somaliland officials in Hargeisa that outsiders



have tried to buy the support of local notables has led this authority to outlaw acceptance of these payments.

Could a fundamental shift occur in the expression of identities in Somalia? Based on the analysis above, it would have to accompany a wholesale change in the current ordering of that culture's social system. It would have to include features such as an abnegation of the authority of local notables who, frustrating though their shifting alliances may be, appear to be a core stabilizing element of this system. A sustained campaign of targeted assassinations by committed violent jihad internationalists would be a sign of such a development. This would disrupt the mechanisms that are used to control the exercise of violence and would create a safer environment for those who use radical agendas to recruit local people to fight for their cause. In such circumstances, some local "accidental guerrillas" would be more prone to accepting broader narratives as relevant to their situations. Another signal of weakened local social structures would be the appearance of foreign individuals as prominent militia commanders. As noted above, foreigners have played propaganda roles, but even in the most radical groups, they have not held important independent command positions.

In sum, the first core message of this analysis is that clan identity and, to a lesser extent, Islamic identity in Somalia are used in instrumental ways in local politics, but are enduring in the sense that they provide the framework against which these calculations are made. This can present an image of enduring identity: "The political geography of the Somali hinterland in 1992, consequently, closely resembled that reported by European explorers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with spears replaced by Kalashnikovs and bazookas. These clan areas could only be entered or traversed by outsiders "...with the consent of the locals and usually payment of appropriate fees for 'protection'" (Lewis 1994: 231-32). But it is not a given that these indigenous customs and practices will endure. Thus the second core message of this essay: The frustrating and tedious shifts in local alliances and the seeming stubbornness of local practices probably are what protect Somalia from concerted radical influence. There is considerable evidence that suggests that this is so. For example, why have jihad internationalists performed so poorly in terms of consolidating their influence in what they have labeled a promising region, particularly given that this place does not even have a central government to speak of?

## 7 Research Report – Impacts of Clan Identity and Islamic Identity in Somalia

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### 7.1 Introduction

Somalia's population is over 98% Sunni Muslim, and ethnically quite uniform. Except for the Bantu minority, which constitutes only 6% of the total population, Somalis share a common Cushitic language and largely pastoral culture, as well as the belief that they are descended from a common legendary Arab ancestor – “Samale” – and that their Muslim leaders were descendants of the Aquil Abu Talib, a cousin of the Prophet Mohammed. The ethnic Somali population also comprises six major clan confederations, about twenty large clans, and hundreds more subclans. These three social units are based on extended family-bloodline connections. Primary loyalty to clan, combined with severely limited natural advantages and traditional pastoralism, has spawned pitched clan-based economic and political rivalries.

The attraction of most Somalis to the moderate and peaceful Sufi strain of Sunni Islam, and their ethnological distinctiveness, have been sources of national unity and yielded a secular approach to government. The predominant ideology during Mohammed Siad Barre's 22-year tenure as president was socialism. But the idea of a single nation, while still powerful fuel for xenophobia and exclusion, has been overwhelmed within Somalia by intense, often violent, clan identification. This has led to Somalia's political atomization and ultimately its ungovernability since Siad Barre's autocratic rule collapsed in 1991. The near-anarchy, in turn, has made Somalis – both individually and at the clan level – increasingly vulnerable to Islamists' provision of material sustenance and promise of order through *shari'a* law.

While Somalis, in their common religion and relative ethnic homogeneity, may constitute a nation, nomadic dispersion, the correspondingly transient nature of immediate interests, and genealogically-based social and political rigidity have rendered it difficult for them to maintain a state.

### 7.2 Clan Identity

The six main Somali clan confederations are the Hawiye, Isaak, Darod, Rahanwein, Digil, and Dir. The Rahanwein (making up about 17% of the population) are prevalent in the fertile part of southern Somalia between the Shebelle and Juba Rivers immediately west of Hawiye territory and east of Marehan territory. The smallest clan group, the Digil, occupies a relatively large swath bounded by the southern coast and by Hawiye, Darod and Rahanwein territory. While 60–70% of Somalis are nomadic camel herders or affiliated with a nomadic group, the Rahanwein and Digil – collectively known as the Digil Mirifle – are primarily farmers. Although they understand the standard Cushitic Somali language spoken elsewhere, they have their own language, known as *Af-Maymay*, which other Somalis generally do not understand. Thus, the distinction between the Digil Mirifle and the rest of the large confederations constitutes the most pronounced cultural division within the Somali nation. Socially and politically, the Digil Mirifle

are the most open and accommodating of the Somali clan confederations, allowing outsiders to assimilate and assume a clan's name and identity and acquire local land rights.

The Digil Mirifle's "melting pot" mode of inclusion has led I.M. Lewis – the world's ranking expert on Somali culture – to consider them "theoretically an ideal model for Somali nationalism. For various reasons, however, including the nomads' vigorous genealogical pride and traditional scorn for cultivators, this potential has not been used as a valid basis for modern Somali nationalism whose main proponents have been drawn from nomadic culture" (Lewis 2008: 4). The remaining four clans, then, comprise the quintessential Somalis. They are organized on the basis of descent exclusively from the male line. Somali men are generally polygamous, and marriage is very unstable, its purpose mainly to produce children – especially males who will strengthen the father's lineage and enhance his honor, status and reputation. In Somalia's harsh, sub-desert physical environment with high infant mortality, a large male brood, with implicit coercive power, is also considered insurance.

Clans and subclans are led by elders, generally older men, who loosely formulate clan policies, but their power is more consensual than peremptory, which lends Somali communities a distinctly republican and egalitarian quality as compared with most other African tribal cultures. (Some of the more sedentary farming clans of the Rahanwein and Digil groupings have dynastic families of more authoritative clan leaders, sometimes called sultans.) The strength of kinship with a given social unit invoked by an individual is relative and varies according to context and situation. Darods, for example, identify themselves in distinction to the other five clan confederations – the Hawiye, Isaak, Dir, Digil and Rahanwein – and members of those groups follow the same formula. Members of each Darod clan distinguish themselves primarily from members of other Darod clans, members of each Hawiye clans mainly from those of other Hawiye clans, and so on; and subclans from other subclans.

The paramount kinship ties are traced backwards through an individual's father, his paternal grandfather, the grandfather's father, and so on, to the founding confederation ancestor. Ties with a mother's brother's clan rank second in importance to patrilineal kinship, followed by those established by marriage. The term "cousin," or "uncle" when a young man addresses an older one, applies to all men other than brothers who share a common lineage. The patrilineal bond gives rise to an extended network of loyalties that are defined and limited by contractual treaty, whereby the payment and receipt of blood compensation (*diya* in Arabic, *mag* in Somali) – or, failing that, the duty to take revenge – falls to close relatives who accept the collective responsibility.

The largest confederation, accounting for some 25% of the population, is the Hawiye, which dominates south-central Somalia. Two Hawiye clans – the Abgal and the Habr-Gedir – have battled for control of Mogadishu, Somalia's capital and largest city, since Siad Barre's fall twenty years ago. The next largest is the Isaak confederation, with 22% of the population, which occupies the self-declared (but internationally unrecognized) state of Somaliland, in northwest Somalia, which enjoys a level of government and stability far greater than the minimal degree that prevails in southern Somalia. The small Dir grouping lives in Somaliland and across the borders of Ethiopia and Djibouti. The Darod confederation, at 20%, is a close third in size; the Darod – in particular, its Harti clan grouping, comprising the Dulbahante, Warsangali, and Majerteen clans – is dominant in Puntland, another self-styled quasi-state declared in 1998 in northeast and central Somalia in which most of the Somali pirates' land bases are located (the pirates are predominantly Darod, although the Hawiye started the modern practice). Its Marehan

clan lives in areas in the extreme southwest of the country, near the Kenyan border, and mainly Marehan established, with Kenyan support, a new secular administration for “Jubaland” in 2010, loosely following the leads of Somaliland and Puntland. The Darod Ogadeni clan resides in eastern Ethiopia and eastern Kenya.

Current clan identifications and rivalries are best understood in the larger context of recent Somali history, beginning with the decolonization period. Having been part of Italy’s short-lived “African Empire,” following Italy’s defeat in World War II Somali territories (except for Djibouti, which stayed French) came under British dominion. In 1950, they were partitioned, with Somaliland in the northwest remaining a British protectorate, the Ogaden returned to Ethiopia, and the remainder of the territory run by Italy under a United Nations trusteeship. In 1960, British Somaliland and Italian Somalia became independent and united to form a single country. Meeting in Mogadishu, the new national assembly, under Prime Minister Abdirashid Ali Shermarke, a Darod, elected Adan Abdulle Osman, a Hawiye, provisional president of the new state. Shermarke’s fourteen-member cabinet was drawn from the major clan groupings and broadly reflected the ratio of northern (33) to southern (90) seats in the assembly. The former prime minister of Somaliland, Mohamed Haji Ibrahim Egal of the Isaak grouping, became minister of defense, and Abdillahi Ise, a Hawiye, foreign minister.

While initial bullishness on nationhood produced a rhetorical impulse among Somali leaders to refer to “ex-clans,” in fact traditional loyalties and corresponding patronage, corruption and nepotism produced bureaucratic dysfunction and friction. A multitude of political parties were fronts for confederations, clans and subclans. Egal became prime minister in 1967 and halted earlier governments’ diplomatic and military attempts to regain Somali-inhabited areas of Ethiopia and Kenya, producing growing dissent among Somali politicians. After he was assassinated by a disgruntled bodyguard in 1969, Siad Barre, a member of the Marehan clan of the Darod confederation, then commander of the army, staged a well-executed coup that met no serious resistance.

A strongman dictator from the start, Siad Barre initially behaved like an enlightened despot. He supported the establishment of a written Somali language. He pursued socialist policies that sought to strengthen the Somali state by, in addition to reducing poverty and ignorance through state control of commerce and education, abolishing clan divisions. For instance, he substituted the death penalty for the blood compensation usually paid through elder-administered treaties to resolve inter-clan conflicts – though this practice was not eradicated for small transgressions – and established the word *jalle*, meaning “comrade” or “friend,” as the preferred Somali greeting as opposed to the customary “uncle” or “cousin.” Structurally, the eight provinces of the country – which corresponded to clan prevalence – were reconstituted into 15 regions with 78 districts and purged of clan-based nomenclature, and local settlement became the putative unit of identification in place of clan.

Nevertheless, Somalis were apt to regard Siad Barre’s regime as composed essentially of the three dominant Darod subclans: his own Marehan, based in the middle Juba Valley; his mother’s Ogadeni clan, whose strongholds were in Ethiopia and Kenya; and the Dulbahante of which his son-in-law, head of the National Security Service, was a member, and whose territory straddled the former border between British Somaliland and Italian Somalia. And these groups were, in fact, disproportionately represented in key government positions. Thus, over the course of his rule, Siad Barre’s avowed anti-clan philosophy – particularly after the United States replaced the Soviet Union as Somalia’s superpower backer in the late 1970s, and socialism became a less

credible pretext for national policies – came to be seen as a sham. While nationalism and Islam played central roles in Somali foreign policy – Somalia joined the Arab League in 1974 – domestic politics were increasingly driven by traditional clan affiliations.

Following Ethiopia's defeat of Somalia in the Ogaden War in 1977-78 and the influx of ethnic Somali refugees from the Ogaden, which Siad Barre had sought to annex, resource scarcity and political recriminations sharpened clan identification and competition. A failed 1978 military coup attempt was seen mainly as the product of an intra-Darod feud between the Majerteen clan, of which most of the plotters were members and which had dominated previous civilian governments, and Siad Barre's Marehan clan. Thereafter, the Majerteen formed an opposition group called the Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF) in Ethiopia and, with Ethiopian support, waged an unsuccessful guerrilla campaign against Siad Barre's regime. In the 1980s, the largely Isaak Somali National Movement (SNM) asserted its dissatisfaction with the regime and, following the SSDF's example, set up a base in Ethiopia and launched guerrilla attacks on the government. This produced severe reprisals and virtual martial law in the northwestern Isaak areas. An increasingly insular Siad Barre closed ranks, and his Marehan clan tightened its grip on Somali governance.

A détente between Ethiopia and Somalia, under which the former withdrew support for the SSDF and the SNM, prompted the SNM to attack military outposts in northern Somalia, leading to the 1988-91 civil war between Siad Barre's regime and the Isaak. The regime nakedly appealed to Darod and inter-clan predation and allegiance, employing both rewards and coercion. It encouraged Ogadeni refugees to occupy bombed-out and abandoned Isaak stores and houses, and appealed to the Majerteen as well as non-Darod clans like the Issa and Gadabursi of the Dir group to take up arms against the Isaak. The Isaak, in turn, appealed to the Hawiye, which was ancestrally closely related, for help in and around Mogadishu. They complied, two of its most powerful clans – the Abgal and the Habr-Gedir – forming the United Somali Congress (USC), which was linked to the Somali Patriotic Movement (SPM) composed of mutinous Ogadeni soldiers who felt Siad Barre had abandoned their cause. By early 1991, the SNM had dislodged regime forces from the north, and the USC – led by the Habr-Gedir General Mohammed Farah Aideed – had staged an uprising in Mogadishu against the Darod and forced Siad Barre to flee the capital.

Meanwhile, an Abgal-dominated self-appointed “interim government” led by Ali Mahdi Mohammed took control of Mogadishu, and fighting broke out between the Abgal and the suspicious Habr-Gedir until Ali Mahdi and Aideed tenuously agreed to share power. Hawiye revenge killings of Darods – especially those of the Dulbahante clan, associated with the National Security Service – inspired Darod solidarity and perpetuated Hawiye-Darod fighting. As chaos enveloped southern Somalia, in the north the Isaak were able to make relative peace by traditional means with non-Isaak clans by virtue of their shared contempt and mistrust of the south, and in May 1991 declared the independent “Somaliland Republic,” with boundaries identical to those of British Somaliland. Having commandeered weapons from Siad Barre's large Cold War arsenal and subject to no central governmental authority, clans tended to organize their own militias, usually adopting a dignifying political acronym, and Somalis widely reverted to clan as the principal source of sustenance and security. Through a frustrated UN peace enforcement effort (proposed and initially led by the United States) and over a dozen offsite peace negotiations and failed transitional governments, clan-based ad hoc government, punctuated with violence, persisted.

### 7.3 Clans and Politics in the Post-Siad Barre Era

Conflicting clan-based attitudes persist about whether a unitary or federal state makes the most sense for Somalia. In general, the favored position turns on clan strength and prospects. Those belonging to weaker groups (such as the Digil Mirifle) often advocate regional autonomy or at least some form of decentralization, which they see as protection from stronger groups, and argue that local administrations tend to be more representative and therefore more legitimate. They point out that in Somaliland, elders from different clans have been able, through a series of negotiations, to establish a workable joint form of governance. Decentralization proponents also note that local administrations tend to be more efficient and capable of responding to local needs, and, by virtue of the greater trust and legitimacy inherent in their clan-based structure, better able to justify and collect revenues and provide for the local welfare. The upshot, the argument runs, is that regional power structures stand the best chance of lowering political tensions, and that working through them – from the bottom up – offers the best chance for national reconciliation and the re-constitution of the Somali state. Some highly knowledgeable pro-decentralization analysts have argued that Somaliland and perhaps Puntland might be accorded some kind of internationally recognized quasi-sovereign status – which would, for instance, qualify the new entities for aid from international financial institutions – with an eye towards incentivizing southern clans to bring greater order to their areas.

In most of the post-Siad Barre reconciliation conferences in the 1990s, however, the participants – mainly faction leaders and warlords – tilted towards the centralized approach and focused on forging a unitary arrangement for the whole of Somalia. Even among clans broadly in favor of federalism there was some ambivalence: Puntland, unlike Somaliland, did not declare its secession or independence and acknowledged explicitly that it was part of Somalia. Southern warlords unequivocally opposed federalism. Thus, reconciliation meetings tended to become entrenched power struggles over political influence and status: the number of factions involved multiplied, the deals they made were never fulfilled, and no stable settlement materialized.

The Addis Ababa conference in March 1993 did, to be sure, arrive at a kind of hybrid central-federal government, with directly elected district councils along with eighteen regional councils. In practice, however, UN oversight cleaved towards centralization, and warlords occupied the most powerful positions, so power struggles among them simply re-emerged and sabotaged the experiment. After UN disengagement, the regional Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) promoted a “building-block” approach, whereby competent and stable local administrative structures would eventually compose a workable federation of Somaliland-like entities. But Ethiopia’s sponsorship of the IGAD initiative split Somalis and ultimately aggravated the rivalry between the Darod and the Hawiye, the two most powerful confederations. In any case, members of larger and stronger clans tend to regard federalism as an attempt to dilute the political and economic power that they see as rightfully theirs. Furthermore, more detached critics of decentralization warn that it can have serious technocratic and geopolitical drawbacks and unintended consequences. One fear is that it will permanently divide Somalia into smaller and smaller units, quelling all prospects for national integration and modern statehood. Indeed, Somaliland’s drive for full secession supports this argument. From the time of its declaration of independence in 1991, Somaliland’s polity has matured and become a semi-functional democracy. As its sovereign attributes have coalesced, its case for full separation from Somalia – along with its disinclination to risk reverting to the anarchy of the south, or being marginalized by belligerent southern clans – has been strengthened.

If there is a consensus view, it would be that any building-block program could merely end up rendering mainly northern clan confederations (Isaak and Darod) all the more insular and predominantly southern ones (Hawiye, Rahanwein, Digil) that much more hostile to them, and more broadly encourage destabilizing factionalism and separatism in Africa and elsewhere. Strategic considerations also suggest that a unified Somalia would be the natural geopolitical balancer against Ethiopia and would be less susceptible to destabilizing agitation by Eritrea, the local spoiler. Accordingly, the externally brokered arrangements – including the internationally recognized Transitional Federal Government (TFG), nominally in place since 2005 – have defaulted to centralization. The TFG president was Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed, a Darod, and the government split into an Ethiopia-backed Darod camp and a rival Mogadishu-based Hawiye faction, the latter fracturing even further along the usual clan lines. The TFG has proved unable or unwilling to rein in the criminal activities of its ministers and assembly members, and too politically divided and institutionally weak to govern effectively.

Since Siad Barre's regime collapsed in 1991, the only force other than clan affiliation that has proved able to inspire Somali fealty has been radical Islam. This development has dovetailed with the more homogeneous clan topography that has resulted from insecurity and internal displacement. In particular, non-resident clans, supported by armed militias, have moved to urban and fertile areas. Conflict with native clans has ensued, raising the specter of "clan cleansing," some of which has already occurred in the Gedo and Bay regions at the hands of the Marehan and Rahanwein, respectively. Having minimal institutional capacity to begin with, the TFG has been unable to ameliorate these and related problems. With the building-block approach politically infeasible at least for the moment, the TFG's inefficacy has created a political vacuum that radical Islam has, by default, filled.

## 7.4 Islamic Identity

Islam is deeply entrenched in Somalia and requires a longer historical perspective than clan identity for full comprehension. Somalis generally follow the three traditional Sufi mystical brotherhoods: the *Qadiriya*, the *Ahmadiya*, and its nineteenth-century reformist derivative, the *Salihya*. (A fourth order, the *Rafa'iyya*, has a very small following.) The *Qadiriya*, the oldest and least fundamentalist and puritanical among the three, has the largest Somali constituency. But Somali *Qadiriya* have placed their own imprimatur on their religion, establishing a calendar of local saints, including the twelfth-century missionary Sharif Yusuf al-Qoniin – known as Aw Barkhadle, or "blessed one" – who is venerated to the extent that three successive visits to his shrine in northern Somalia, near Hargeisa, are considered equivalent to the *haj* to Mecca. His prestige carries over to practical life, as he is credited with bringing the Arabian sheep to Somalia and inventing a Somali notation for Arabic vowels that eased the teaching of Arabic and, ultimately, the creation of the Somali language.

A degree of antagonism between moderate and conservative Islam in Somalia predates the late twentieth century and the advent of al-Qaeda and transnational jihadism. In 1819, in the walled city of Bardera in southern Somalia, a sheikh probably affiliated with the *Ahmadiya* order outlawed tobacco, prohibited the social mixing of men and women (e.g., folk dancing), and directed women to wear the veil. Barderans were then dispatched to attack surrounding clans considered insufficiently pious. Under the leadership of the powerful Sultan of the Geledi (based in Afgoi, near Mogadishu), they retaliated with 40,000 warriors. In a few days, Bardera was burned to the ground. Jihadism did not resurface until the end of the century.

Salihya fundamentalists objected to the Qadiriya cult of saints, and each brotherhood routinely accused the other of apostasy. The Salihya, in particular, believed the Qadiriya supported Christian colonizers. In the so-called Dervish War (1899-20), the Salihya, under a charismatic Darod Ogadeni leader named Sayyid Muhammad Abdille Hassan – dubbed “The Mad Mullah” by the British – led and coordinated Somalis in armed resistance initially against the Ethiopians and then the British and Italians, all of whom he called “infidels,” in the British Somaliland protectorate and surrounding territories. While this was the first instance of sustained anti-colonial Somali national unity and the most forceful Somali expression of Islam as a distinguishing and exclusionary national characteristic – it was in essence a defensive jihad – it also produced the first major clash between fundamentalist and moderate Somali Islam. In 1909, Hassan led a Salihya attack on the headquarters of the southern Qadiriya leader, Sheikh Uweys, killing him and several of his disciples. His tomb at Bioley remains an important pilgrimage destination in southern Somalia.

The British defeated Hassan’s forces in 1920, and his demise to many Somalis signifies the folly of religious extremism; indeed, his revolutionary radicalism gave way to cautious reformism in the 1920s and 1930s. Nevertheless, as Lewis has noted, “it was hardly necessary to import inspiration specifically from al-Qaida to mobilize Somali religious fervour, especially when it was combined with clan solidarity” (Lewis 2008: 86). The most recent wave of aggressive fundamentalism began in the late 1980s and early 1990s when Arab Wahabbi – i.e., Salafiya – missionaries from Saudi Arabia, Sudan and elsewhere seized on social disorder and poverty occasioned by the collapse of Siad Barre’s government to recruit followers with money and weapons. *Al-Islamiah al-Ittihaad* (AIAI), in particular, echoed the Salihya’s traditional disdain for the Qadiriya cult of saints and the claims made for their mystical healing techniques – e.g., washing Koranic scripture freshly transcribed by a sheikh into a cup with water and drinking it.

Although these conventions may seem fanciful to Westerners, they have played an important role in Somali daily life and, moreover, illuminate a key distinction between Somali and Arab sheikhs. Whereas sheikhs occupy a decidedly authoritative and godly position in Arab society, the relatively egalitarian Somalis see them more as mere mediators between men and God, and among men. They are expected – for an appropriate fee – to administer blessings and potions so as to promote prosperity and fertility, as well as to conduct weddings, funerals and, occasionally, sacrifices. Religious practice in Somalia, then, is as much business as it is God’s work. Thus, while Somali tradition does divide society into two main groups – sheikhs and warriors – and strongly prefers clerics not to assume the political and administrative duties of clan elders such as *diya*-paying, there is no hard-and-fast practical distinction between the two, and any notional dividing line breaks down when the resort to arms is for a religious cause, as it was in the Dervish War.

This feature of Somalis’ social character appears to have made them fairly susceptible to jihadization, and particularly resilient jihadists. In 2007, while U.S.-supported Ethiopian forces, at the invitation of the TFG, ousted the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) that had held de facto power in Mogadishu for six months, the Ethiopians and the secular subclans’ backing the TFG also crystallized their status as Christian interlopers and infidels, respectively. This reinforced the Somali jihadists’ resistance to the TFG and ultimately enabled them to rebound in an arguably more dangerous way.



## 7.5 The Current Interplay of Clan and Islamic Identity

Salafist jihadism has increased Somalia's ethno-political combustibility by impinging on moderate Sunni Islam over the past twenty years, particularly in southern Somalia. The Salafists, like more moderate Somali Islamists, believe that Islam and Islamic values should determine individual and communal social, political and economic life, seek a "Greater Somalia" that includes the Ogaden region of Ethiopia and part of Kenya, and reject federalism. In the broader international context, the rise of Somali Islamists, their opposition to a secular and internationally sanctioned government, Somalia's geographical proximity to the Middle East and Central Asia, and its absence of an effective government friendly to the secular West has defined Somalia as a potential flashpoint in the U.S.-led "war on terror." The U.S. State Department's Bureau of African Affairs, according to an internal report circulated in August 2009, rated Somalia "the hottest of many policy fires burning" in Africa (US DOS 2009: 7).

Somali jihadists have provided operational support for transnational jihadism since shortly after the September 11 attacks, if not earlier. The explosives used in the December 2002 attack on Israeli tourists in Mombasa, Kenya, are believed to have been transported from Somalia, and several of the perpetrators of that attack and the nearly simultaneous attempted shoot-down of an Israeli airliner leaving Mombasa have hidden out there. Perpetrators of the attempted London bombings on July 21, 2005, included a Somali as well as an Eritrean and an Ethiopian, and at least one Somali was among the 17 people arrested in Canada in June 2006 on suspicion of terrorist activity. Especially since 9/11, operatives of al-Qaeda's East Africa cell have found safe haven there. Islamist militants in Somalia have grown in number, probably by an order of magnitude, and resurged accordingly. Loosely estimated at between 5,000 and 10,000, they now control most of the territory in southern Somalia.

The oldest of Somalia's late twentieth-century jihadist groups was AIAI, which had a multi-clan constituency centered in the northeast. It was decimated as a result of popular hostility and, reportedly, raids by Ethiopian troops and allied Somali clans in the 1990s. The ICU had its roots in AIAI. But while AIAI had financial and logistical connections to Saudi Wahhabis, the ICU was a predominantly Somali phenomenon. Composed of some eleven often bickering clan- or subclan-based groups, and led by unsophisticated locally trained clerics, the ICU was not especially unified. But their martial success in displacing the authority of the TFG, establishment of a modicum of order and stability, extension of welfare, and facilitation of commerce did empower the clerics. They in turn latched onto the notion of jihad that al-Qaeda had elevated to a transnational Islamic phenomenon and, also girded by Somalia's Dervish War history and Wahhabi notions of religious purity, opposed the traditional mystical beliefs (such as the cult of saints) most Somali Muslims held. They also enforced a stricter moral code, among other things outlawing *khat*, the mildly amphetamine leaf widely chewed by Somalis as a social lubricant, as well as piracy, and eventually imposed *shari'a*. This produced popular backlash, which has meant that the power of the ICU and its successors has ebbed and flowed. The shortsightedness of external actors, however, has helped sustain their appeal.

The Ethiopians stayed in Somalia for two years after dislodging the ICU, and the occupation was brutal, their use of heavy weapons against protesting Somali civilians – mainly Hawiye – conjuring memories of Siad Barre's regime in its last days. Their tactics produced guerrilla retaliation, and much of Mogadishu's beleaguered population – hundreds of thousands – fled to refugee camps on the Kenyan border. Islamists, in turn, started to look like a more attractive alternative to Somalis. After the Ethiopians' 2008-09 withdrawal, the ICU essentially morphed

into *Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen*, known simply as *al-Shabaab*. It has gained political and territorial traction, shown a transnational operational disposition, and proclaimed allegiance to core al-Qaeda. Al-Shabaab means “the youth” in Somali, and the group has been especially attractive to young men from weaker clans and subclans in that it presents an alternative – though a largely untested one – to secular clan government underpinned by traditional inter-clan and -subclan power relationships. Its principal rival in Somalia was *Hizbul Islam*, a primarily Marehan rival Islamist militia now headed by Aweys, but al-Shabaab may have substantially absorbed the group in late 2010.

While al-Shabaab has recruited from all of the clan federations, its largest pools are the Darod, Hawiye and Isaak, which have different relative strengths in each of the group’s four main areas of operation. (By the same token, the strongest secular resistance to Islamism and jihadism appears to have come in considerable part from the Hawiye as well – for example, in the form of the CIA-backed “Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counter-Terrorism,” set up as an alternative to the ineffective TFG during the run-up to the Ethiopian invasion.) Al-Shabaab’s stated aim is to create a fundamentalist Islamist state across the Horn of Africa. The group’s core leadership sprang from a nucleus of hardline Somali militants working with AIAI, then headed by Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys, that provided protection and support (such as training camps) for al-Qaeda’s East Africa cell. Al-Shabaab eventually broke from the AIAI leadership, began “manhunting” operations against secular warlords supporting Western counter-terrorism efforts, and targeted international aid workers and peace activists. The organization, though relatively flat and with loose command-and-control, then became the ICU’s elite fighting force. Al-Shabaab is now the main force of the Somali Islamist insurgency that opposes the TFG.

The titular leader of al-Shabaab is Sheikh Mohamed Mukhtar Abdirahman – known as Abu Zubeyr – but a core group of senior leaders appears to govern its major operations. The group is divided into three geographical units: one covering Bay and Bokool, led by Mukhtar Roobow (Abu Mansur), an Isaak who also serves as the group’s spokesman; another unit covering south-central Somalia and Mogadishu; and a third responsible for Puntland on the Horn itself and Somaliland, the effectively autonomous de facto state in the northwest. A fourth unit, which controls the Juba Valley, is led by Hassan Abdillahi Hersi “Turki” – from the Ogadeni clan of the Darod confederation – who is not regarded as a member of al-Shabaab but is closely aligned with it. As noted, many of al-Shabaab’s several thousand members are from the Hawiye confederation, which dominates the south-central geographical unit covering Mogadishu. But broad kinship does not translate into smooth cohesiveness within al-Shabaab, since there are often fierce rivalries in Somalia at the subclan as well as the clan level. Accordingly, al-Shabaab’s regional units often act independently of one another, and friction among them frequently arises.

Al-Shabaab (as well as Hizbul Islam) has provided training camps for al-Qaeda as well as safe haven for a number of its higher-ranking East Africa operatives. At least two of them have been killed in Somalia – Abu Talha al-Sudani by the Ethiopians in 2007 and Saleh Ali Saleh Nabhan by U.S. special-operations forces in September 2009. In February 2009, al-Shabaab also staged the deadliest attack on African Union peacekeepers since their deployment, killing eleven Burundian soldiers; in further fighting in Mogadishu, at least fifteen people died. Until July 2010, however, the group’s most sophisticated terrorist attacks – five coordinated explosions carried out in October 2008, involving Somali-American recruits, at local government offices, a United Nations compound and the Ethiopian consulate – had occurred in the relatively peaceful northern areas of Somalia, Somaliland and Puntland. In staging the devastating bombings in Kampala, killing 76 people, al-Shabaab ventured “out of area” for the first time and enlisted several

Ugandans. The presence of Ugandan troops in Somalia, making up most of a 7,000-strong African Union (AU) peacekeeping force (known as AMISOM), was the purported justification for the attack.

While the Kampala attacks were consistent with al-Shabaab's ambitious strategic narrative, they did not mean that the group had become part of the global vanguard of al-Qaeda. Unlike al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (based in Yemen), al-Qaeda in Iraq, or al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, al-Shabaab has not formally merged with core al-Qaeda. It is possible that al-Qaeda has not chosen to anoint al-Shabaab with such an affiliation because it suspects that, leaving aside some irredentist claims to Ethiopian territory, al-Shabaab's ambitions are limited to Somalia itself.

Some of al-Shabaab's major players – such as veteran jihadist Fazul Abdullah Mohammed, the Comorian whose involvement in al-Qaeda's East African operations dates back to the 1998 United States embassy bombings in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, and is considered to be al-Shabaab's military leader – do have strong links to al-Qaeda. An AMISOM report has identified another half-dozen non-Somalis (from Kenya, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Sudan and the United States) who occupy important positions in al-Shabaab. Yet al-Shabaab's principal (though probably not a substantial) source of outside support is not al-Qaeda but Eritrea, which regards it as a potential proxy against Ethiopia, its traditional foe. Though the recent attacks may have been intended to burnish al-Shabaab's jihadist credentials and to attract more attention and backing from al-Qaeda, there does not appear to be any major connection at the planning or strategic level between core al-Qaeda and al-Shabaab. Rather, as between al-Qaeda and the Philippine Islamist militias Abu Sayyaf and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, there is so far merely the mutual and limited political advantage that each derives in claiming an association with the other. Nevertheless, with its narrative somewhat eroded by the largely secular nature of the revolutionary protests that have swept across the broader Middle East, and its post-9/11 operational preference for devolution, there appears to be a fairly good chance that core al-Qaeda will in time formally declare al-Shabaab an official franchise.

A further purpose of al-Shabaab's recent activity may have been to intimidate its domestic opponents and consolidate its position within Somalia. It warned that "foreign forces" could join it in the future, echoing reports that it was recruiting from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Chechnya, as well as from the Somali diaspora in the United States (as was the case for the October 2008 bombings) and Canada. Such a recruitment drive could have a significant impact on regional and international security, leading al-Shabaab to become more transnational in nature in spite of its essentially nationalist vocation.

However, al-Shabaab's prospects within Somalia are uncertain. It is under growing pressure from the broader Somali population, which increasingly resents its Taliban-like *shari'a*-based intolerance and violence. In January 2009, for instance, secular clan-based militias repelled al-Shabaab's attempts to assert control in the central Somalia area of Galgadud. Also in central Somalia, a Sufi Muslim militia called *Ahlu Sunna wal Jamaa*, which originated in 1991 and opposes the radical and militant interpretations of Islam espoused by al-Qaeda and al-Shabaab, has gained considerable influence. The group appears to consist mainly of members of the Ayr and Saad subclans of the Habr-Gedir clan – all Hawiye entities – which could make inroads on al-Shabaab's Hawiye base. And thousands of Somalis have flocked to the overcrowded Dadaab refugee camp over the Kenyan border to escape al-Shabaab's public whippings, stonings and amputations. Hizbul Islam has a more explicitly nationalist predisposition and is more inclined to moderate its tactics – e.g., by confining attacks to southern Somalia and making efforts to avoid

civilian casualties. But its rapprochement and possible merger with al-Shabaab in late 2010 may have made it a less distinct positive alternative.

By inviting Ethiopia to invade Somalia in 2006, the TFG tweaked Somalis' nationalist nerves and lost most of its popular credibility and legitimacy, prompting Somali Islamists and opposition groups to form the Alliance for the Re-liberation of Somalia (ARS) in 2007 and eventually impelling Abdullahi Yusuf to resign in December 2008. In January 2009, after a series of UN-mediated talks in Djibouti, the TFG and the ARS (though with some key figures, like Aweys, opting out) signed the Djibouti Agreement, whereby the TFG parliament was expanded from 275 to 550 members in the hopes of realizing more equitable clan representation and to accommodate moderate Islamist parties. Less than a week after the parliamentary reform was approved, Sharif Sheikh Ahmed – a moderate Islamist and former leader of the ICU – won the January 2009 presidential election. As a member of the Abgal, one of the two critical Mogadishu-centered Hawiye clans, he seemed to stand a chance of resolving conflicts with the rival Habr-Gedir, and perhaps even al-Shabaab. Furthermore, as former head of the ICU, Sheikh Sharif had considerable credibility with the Somali Islamist community, and the withdrawal of Ethiopian troops in winter/spring 2009 enhanced his broader domestic appeal. The idea behind the structural reform of the parliament was that Sheikh Sharif might consolidate his presidential authority sufficiently to use force effectively against rival militias in the south and render a functioning unitary state more feasible.

In practical terms, however, the TFG's authority has remained limited to certain areas of Mogadishu, and it is still incapable of providing effective social services, law enforcement or general governance. The fact that in August 2010 al-Shabaab's fighters were able to mount a ten-day campaign in the heart of Mogadishu, staying in guesthouses, served to underline the TFG's very circumscribed writ and its vulnerability to adverse local support. Overall, however, Islam's scope for unifying Somalia remains highly constrained by more deeply-rooted clan allegiances and divisions. The risk posed by this reality is that domestic frustration could intensify the disposition of Somali Islamist groups – al-Shabaab in particular – to become transnational actors more fully aligned and integrated with al-Qaeda.

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## **Annex A. Biographies**

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### **Anderson, David M. BA, Ph.D.**

University Lecturer in African Politics and Fellow of St Cross College, University of Oxford

David Anderson is University Lecturer in African Politics and Fellow of St Cross College, University of Oxford, having spent the previous three years as a Research Fellow in African Studies, based at St. Antony's College. His Oxford connections began in 2002 when he was elected to the Evans-Pritchard Visiting Lectureship at All Souls. He first studied History at the University of Sussex, going on to begin doctoral studies at Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1978, after which he took up a Research Fellowship at New Hall, Cambridge. In 1984 he was appointed Lecturer in Imperial & Commonwealth History at Birkbeck College, University of London, moving just a few hundred yards across Bloomsbury in 1990 to become Senior Lecturer in African History, and then Director of the Centre for African Studies in the University of London (1997-2001). His research interests have remained focused upon eastern and central Africa, but his published work has ranged across a wide variety of topics, from histories of environmental change to current analysis of political violence. David Anderson is co-editor of the *Journal of Eastern African Studies*. Publications include: *Africa's Urban Past, Eroding the Commons: The Politics of Ecology in Baringo, Kenya, 1890–1963* (co-author) (2002); *Histories of the Hanged: Britain's Dirty War in Kenya and the End of Empire* (2005); *The Khat Controversy: Stimulating the Drugs Debate* (2006); and numerous articles in professional journals.

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### **Bruton, Bronwyn**

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Bronwyn Bruton, a democracy and governance specialist with extensive experience in Africa, was a 2008-2009 international affairs fellow in residence at the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR). She was born in Swaziland and spent most of her childhood in Botswana. Prior to her fellowship appointment, Bronwyn spent three years at the National Endowment for Democracy, where she managed a \$7-million portfolio of grants to local and international nongovernmental organizations in east and southern Africa (priority countries included Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Uganda, Kenya, Zimbabwe, and Sudan). Ms. Bruton has also served as a program manager on the Africa team of the U.S. Agency for International Development's Office of Transition Initiatives, as a policy analyst on the international affairs and trade team of the Government Accountability Office, and as a program officer at the Center for International Private Enterprise. Ms. Bruton holds an MPP, with honors, from the University of California at Los Angeles.

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Dr. J. Andrew Grant is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Studies at Queen's University. In 2009, Dr. Grant received an Early Researcher Award from the Government of Ontario's Ministry of Research and Innovation. The award enables Dr. Grant to serve as the Principal Investigator of a research project that examines governance and competitiveness in mining. During the 2005-2006 academic year, he was a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada Postdoctoral Fellow with the Center for International and Comparative Studies at Northwestern University. From April to June 2003, he was an intern at the Campaign for Good Governance in Freetown, Sierra Leone. Dr. Grant is co-editor of *The New Regionalism in Africa* (with F. Söderbaum, Ashgate 2003), editor of *Darfur: Reflections on the Crisis and the Responses* (QCIR 2009), and co-editor of *The Research Companion to Regionalisms* (with T. M. Shaw and S. Cornelissen, Ashgate forthcoming). His recent publications focus on conflict diamonds and the Kimberley Process, regional security, transitional justice, post-conflict reconstruction, and governance issues relating to natural resource extraction. He has conducted field research in Sierra Leone, Ghana, Botswana, Namibia and South Africa. Dr. Grant is also a Senior Fellow with the Queen's Centre for International Relations, a Faculty Associate with the Queen's Southern African Research Centre, a Research Fellow with the Centre for Foreign Policy Studies at Dalhousie University, the Secretary of the International Studies Association – Canada region, and the Chair of the International Political Science Association Research Committee #40 (New World Orders).

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J. Peter Pham is Senior Vice President and Africa Project Director at the National Committee on American Foreign Policy in New York City. He also holds an academic appointment as Associate Professor of Justice Studies, Political Science, and African Studies at James Madison University in Harrisonburg, Virginia, and is non-resident Senior Fellow at the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies in Washington, D.C.

Professor Pham has authored, edited, or translated over a dozen books, including *Liberia: Portrait of a Failed State* (2004) and *Child Soldiers, Adult Interests: Global Dimensions of the Sierra Leonean Tragedy* (2005), and is the author of over three hundred essays and reviews on a wide variety of subjects in scholarly and opinion journals on both sides of the Atlantic. He writes *Strategic Interests*, a one-of-a-kind weekly column on African security issues distributed by the World Defense Review, and regularly contributes to a number of online publications, including National Interest Online and ForeignPolicy.com.

Professor Pham has testified before the U.S. Congress on numerous occasions and conducted briefings or consulted for the U.S. and foreign governments as well as private firms. He has appeared in various media outlets, including CBS, PBS, CBC, SABC, VOA, CNN, the Fox News Channel, MSNBC, National Public Radio, the BBC, Radio France Internationale, the Associated Press, Reuters, The Wall Street Journal, The New York Times, The Washington Post, The

Washington Times, USA Today, National Journal, Newsweek, The Weekly Standard, New Statesman, and Maclean's, among others.

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Professor Reno is a specialist in African politics and the politics of "collapsing states." His current work examines violent commercial organizations in Africa, the former Soviet Union, and the Balkans and their relationships to state power and global economic actors. Reno's research takes him to places such as Sierra Leone, Congo and Central Asia where he talk to insurgents (including so-called "warlords"), government officials, and foreigners involved in these conflicts. His books include *Corruption and State Politics in Sierra Leone* (Cambridge 1995) and *Warlord Politics and African States* (Lynne Rienner 1998). He is completing the forthcoming volume, *The Evolution of Warfare in Independent Africa*.

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Jonathan Stevenson is a professor of strategic studies at the Naval War College, and was Senior Fellow for Counter-terrorism and editor of *Strategic Survey* at the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS). He spent most of the 1990's as a journalist in sub-Saharan Africa and Northern Ireland, and his previous books include *Losing Mogadishu: Testing US Policy in Somalia* (1995) and *"We Wrecked the Place": Contemplating an End to the Northern Irish Troubles* (1996). He has published articles in Foreign Affairs, Foreign Policy, and The National Interest, as well as in The New York Times, The Boston Globe, The Wall Street Journal, and The New Republic.

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The Socio-cognitive Systems Section (SCSS) of Defence Research and Development Canada – Toronto (DRDC Toronto) has been tasked with advancing our understanding of the motivations, intentions and behaviours of Armed Non-state Actors (ANSAs) in the context of violent intergroup conflict in fragile and failing states. For this, DRDC Toronto has contracted the Royal Military College of Canada's (RMCC) Centre for Security, Armed Forces and Society (CSAFS) to address the question of the importance of clan and Islamic identities in Somali culture using an alternative perspectives (or diegetic red teaming) approach. CSAFS asked six internationally recognized experts on Somalia to tackle this question from the anthropological, historical, political and advocacy perspectives. This Contract Report presents the six papers that represent the culmination of this coordinated and comprehensive effort.

La Section des systèmes **sociocognitifs** (SSC) de Recherche et développement pour la défense Canada – Toronto (RDDC Toronto) s'est vu confier la tâche d'accroître notre compréhension des motivations, des intentions et des comportements des groupes armés non étatiques dans le contexte des conflits violents entre groupes dans les États fragiles et défaillants. À cette fin, RDDC Toronto a retenu les services du Centre for Security, Armed Forces and Society (CSAFS) du Collège militaire royal pour examiner la question de l'importance de l'identité clanique et de l'identité islamique dans la culture somalienne à l'aide d'une méthode alternative, basée sur l'écoute de perspectives différentes. Le CSAFS a demandé à six experts de renommée internationale sur la Somalie d'aborder cette question des points de vue anthropologique, historique, politique et dans la perspective de la défense des intérêts. Le Rapport final comprend les six documents qui représentent le fruit de cet exercice coordonné et complet.

14. **KEYWORDS, DESCRIPTORS or IDENTIFIERS** (Technically meaningful terms or short phrases that characterize a document and could be helpful in cataloguing the document. They should be selected so that no security classification is required. Identifiers, such as equipment model designation, trade name, military project code name, geographic location may also be included. If possible keywords should be selected from a published thesaurus, e.g. Thesaurus of Engineering and Scientific Terms (TEST) and that thesaurus identified. If it is not possible to select indexing terms which are Unclassified, the classification of each should be indicated as with the title.)

Somalia; Clan identity; Islamic identity; Armed Non-state Actor; al-Shabaab

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